



Jim Rheingans

# The Eighth Karmapa's Life and his Interpretation of the Great Seal

A Religious Life and Instructional Texts  
in Historical and Doctrinal Contexts



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and his Interpretation of the Great Seal

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Steffen Döll | Michael Zimmermann



Numata Center  
for Buddhist Studies

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Figure on Cover: The Eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorje (Photo by Edita Berger)

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## Foreword

### About *Hamburg Buddhist Studies*

Ever since the birth of Buddhist Studies in Germany more than 100 years ago, Buddhism has enjoyed a prominent place in the study of Asian religions. The University of Hamburg continues this tradition by focusing research capacities on the religious dimensions of South, Central, and East Asia and making Buddhism a core subject for students of the Asien-Afrika-Institut.

Today, Buddhist Studies as an academic discipline has diversified into a broad spectrum of approaches and methods. Its lines of inquiry cover contemporary issues as much as they delve into the historical aspects of Buddhism. Similarly, the questions shaping the field of Buddhist Studies have broadened. Understanding present-day Buddhist phenomena—and how such phenomena are rooted in and informed by a distant past—is not at all an idle scholarly exercise. Rather, it has become clear that fostering the understanding of one of the world's major religious traditions is a crucial obligation for modern multicultural societies in a globalized world.

Accordingly, *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* addresses Buddhism as one of the great humanistic traditions of philosophical thought, religious praxis, and social life. Its discussions are of interest to scholars of religious studies and specialists of Buddhism, but also aim at confronting Buddhism's rich heritage with questions the answers to which might not easily be deduced by the exclusive use of historical and philological research methods. Such issues require the penetrating insight of scholars who approach Buddhism from a range of disciplines, building upon and yet going beyond the solid study of texts and historical evidence.

We are convinced that *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* will contribute to opening up the field to those who may have no training in the classical source languages of the Buddhist traditions but approach the topic against the background of their own disciplinary interests. With this book series, we encourage a wider audience to take an interest in the academic study of the Buddhist traditions.



## About this Volume

It is our great pleasure to introduce the seventh volume in the *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* book series, a study by Jim Rheingans who is currently Acting Professor of Tibetan Studies at the University of Bonn. His work, a thorough investigation of the Eighth Karmapa's biography and teachings, and some of his *mahāmudrā* instructions in context, is a most welcome contribution to our understanding of the religious history of Tibet and the study of Tibetan Buddhism in general.<sup>1</sup> Rheingans argues for analysing Buddhist instructions for the acquisition of meditative insight, more specifically those of the Tibetan Kagyüpa *mahāmudrā*, as a pragmatic heuristic adapted to the needs of different disciples. This is achieved through case studies of selected texts ascribed to the Eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorje (1507–1554), and by introducing his religious life on the basis of a broad range of primary sources.

Rheingans' book sets out with a survey of a variety of textual sources for the study of the Karmapa's life and works. It shows how traditional spiritual biographies represent Mikyö Dorje primarily according to the ideal of the learned scholar and accomplished meditator, and how this Karmapa subsequently developed into one of the most productive scholars of his tradition who, located within the shifting religious and political hegemonies of his time, managed to acquire a status of singular importance to his school. Rheingans then goes on to critically assess Mikyö Dorje's *mahāmudrā* teachings by examining the instructions in selected texts as well as their respective contexts. His study contends that the Kagyüpa *mahāmudrā* instructions constitute less a static system than independent teachings to be adapted by the guru to different students' requirements. They are thus chiefly characterised by didactic pragmatism.

Rheingans' research interprets a number of previously unstudied Tibetan texts and manuscripts largely from a historical perspective but at times uses approaches from other fields such as narratology. His work not only contributes significant insights to our knowledge of this period in Tibetan religious history but also sets innovative methodological impulses in the study of Tibetan Buddhism.

Michael Zimmermann and Steffen Döll

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<sup>1</sup> In order to make this foreword and the following preface more readable to a general audience, a phonetic transcription for Tibetan is used. The book itself uses the extended Wylie transcription.

## Preface

This book makes some arguments for analysing Buddhist instructions, more specifically those of the Tibetan Kagyüpa *mahāmudrā*, as a pragmatic heuristic adapted to the students needs. This is done via case studies of selected writings of Mikyö Dorje<sup>1</sup> (1507–1554) and by introducing his religious life in context. Enthroned in 1513 as the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje would become one of the most productive scholars of the Karma Kagyü tradition, alongside the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339). The Eighth Karmapa's extensive study culminated in the composition of large scholastic commentaries to key Indian Buddhist treatises, such as the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, *Abhidharmakośa*, and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*. Being trained early on by his root guru Sangye Nyenpa in his tradition's core teachings, the *mahāmudrā* (Great Seal) and the Six Doctrines of Nāropa, Mikyö Dorje also elaborated on these esoteric instructions, as, for example, in the extensive *sKu gsum ngo sprod* (*Pointing out the Three Buddha Bodies*) or the *Lung sems gnyis med* (*Differentiating Energy-Wind and Mind*). In addition to countless songs (*mgur*) and further instructions (*khrid*), we find comments on grammar and tantric rituals. In complete his literary oeuvre filled more than thirty volumes. Mikyö Dorje lived in a period of shifting hegemonies, when the Kagyüpa patrons of the Rinpungpa clan were relatively dominant in central and western Tibet. He became an important figure of his time and the traditional spiritual biographies portray him according to the ideal of the learned scholar and accomplished meditator (*mkhas sgrub*).

This book investigates the Eighth Karmapa's life and examines selected Great Seal instructions in context. It sets out with a brief survey of the textual sources for the life and works of the Karmapa. Portraying Mikyö Dorje in a religious and political context, it demonstrates that the Eighth Karmapa is not only portrayed as mastering and teaching the highest meditational precepts of his tradition, but was one of the most significant and most productive scholars of his school. This book argues that analysing his

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<sup>1</sup> In order to make this preface more easily readable, a phonetic transcription for Tibetan is used. This work otherwise uses the extended Wylie transcription.

Great Seal teachings, through the study of instruction-related genres in their historical, doctrinal, and literary contexts, reveals a pedagogical pragmatism. It is crucial to view the Great Seal as an independent key instruction that the guru adapts to students' needs, rather than a fixed doctrine. The book contributes to the religious history of Tibet by interpreting a number of previously unstudied Tibetan sources. The main textual sources consist of various early spiritual biographies (*nam thar*) and religious chronicles (*chos 'byung*) along with meditation instructions (*khrid*), question and answer texts (*dris lan*), esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), and advices (*slab bya*) from the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* (2000–2004).

The research was carried out at and fully funded by Bath Spa University, School of Historical and Cultural Studies, with the external supervision of Professor David Jackson, Hamburg University. It was submitted as doctoral dissertation in 2008 to the University of the West of England, Bristol (who, at that time, held the degree awarding powers for doctorates conducted at Bath Spa). Due to continued requests by colleagues and students, and thanks to their encouragement, I have now decided to make the original version of the dissertation available to the wider public, along with only minor alterations. I am delighted that the series editors Michael Zimmermann and Steffen Döll are presenting this work in the *Hamburg Buddhist Studies Series*.

Naturally, aspects of the research about Mikyö Dorje have evolved over time. Substantial contributions to the life of the Eighth Karmapa as a whole have not been made available since 2008.<sup>2</sup> Some works have appeared that touch on the Karmapa's doctrines or on certain literary, doctrinal, and historical contexts. Let me name some as examples. Certain topics brought up in this book have been further considered in some of my own publications, for example in 'Communicating the Innate' (Ayutthaya: IABU Proceedings, 2012). There is a constant influx of publications concerning the Great Seal in general that are too numerous to mention in detail. Good overviews can be found in the papers in *Mahāmudrā and the Bka'-brgyud Tradition: PIATS 2006*, edited by Roger R. Jackson and Mathew T. Kapstein (Halle: IITBS, 2011)<sup>3</sup> or in the recent *Toward a History of Tibetan Mahāmudrā Traditions* (*Zentralasiatische Studien* 44, Andiast: IITBS, 2015) edited by Klaus-Dieter Mathes. Among other works, Alexander

<sup>2</sup> Except for my elaboration on the early years of the Karmapa from 2010 (see Chapter Four, note 2).

<sup>3</sup> This volume includes my paper on a question and answer about the Great Seal as also discussed in Chapter Five (5.3).

Schiller's *Die "Vier Yoga"-Stufen der Mahāmudrā-Meditationstradition* (Dept. of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2014) or Andrew Quintman's *The Yogin and the Madman: Reading the Biographical Corpus of Tibet's Great Saint Milarepa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) offer in-depth studies of 'earlier' Tibetan material. Further, there is research underway in current projects about the Great Seal at the University of Vienna: The Indian/Indo-Tibetan background is further explored in Mathes' *A Fine Blend of Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015). A work that had used this book in its prior thesis format has been published after this book had been submitted to the editors: Martina Draszczyk and David Higgins, *Mahāmudrā and the Middle Way: Post-Classical Kagyü Discourses on Mind, Emptiness and Buddha-Nature* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 2016). They have worked closely with some Great Seal related texts of Mikyö Dorje (some of which I had singled out earlier in my thesis) and address the discourses specific to the historical period.

The context of genre had been specifically highlighted in my dissertation of 2008 that is now published here. Marta Sernesi and Ulrich T. Kragh have also addressed authorship and—to some extent—genre as significant issues in the study of the Great Seal traditions.<sup>4</sup> Approaches to Tibetan *nam thar* and hagiographies of other 'non-occidental' cultures are, among others, discussed in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing*, edited by Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014), where the methods from narratology presented in this book are elaborated (as, for example, in my paper 'Narratology in Buddhist Studies', *ibid.* 69–112). Especially Ulrike Roesler's paper in the aforementioned volume provides a very good overview of the *nam thar* genre.<sup>5</sup>

Some recent publications are connected to historical contexts pertaining to this thesis, for example Olaf Czaja's *Medieval Rule in Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der ÖAW, 2013) or certain remarks in Franz-Karl Ehrhard's paper

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<sup>4</sup> Marta Sernesi, 'The Collected Sayings of the Master: Oral and Written Transmissions and the Authority of Tradition,' *JIAS* 36–37 no. 1–2 (2013, 2014, [2015]), 459–498. Ulrich T. Kragh, 'The Significant Leap from Writing to Print: Editorial Modification in the First Printed Edition of the Collected Works of Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen,' *JIAS* 7 (2013), 365–425.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrike Roesler, 'Operas, Novels, and Religious Instructions: life-stories of Tibetan Buddhist masters between genre classifications,' in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014), 113–140.

about a *Padma'i thang yig*.<sup>6</sup> I expect that the completed dissertation about the Fourth Shamar Incarnate (1453–1524) by Kamilla Mojzes<sup>7</sup> will shed further light on the relation between Mikyö Dorje and the Fourth Shamar incarnate. The proceedings of the conference 'Towards a History of 15th Century Tibet: Cultural Blossoming, Religious Fervour, and Political Unrest' held in March 2015 at the Lumbini International Research Institute, are currently prepared by Volker Caumanns and Marta Sernesi for publication. The papers contained will further contribute to our understanding of this period in general.

With regard to Tibetan sources, some later editions of the collected writings of the Eighth Karmapa and previously unavailable shorter *rnam thar* have been made accessible since 2008. Yuyan Zhong's Master's thesis (LMU Munich, 2013) about the songs from 'Bri gung as documented in the *Handschrift Cod.tibet.5* (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) is another useful contribution concerning this specific part of the Karmapa's writings.

These publications do not significantly change the substance of this research. Although not all of them could be taken into account in detail, the academic works relevant to this research have been mentioned above and crucial ones are incorporated in this book. Those not already mentioned here are further indicated in footnotes in the respective chapters and sections for additional reference. Currently, the abovementioned Tibetan sources and literature relevant to the Karmapa's *gsung 'bum* are examined for my project on the origin and transmissions of Mikyö Dorje's writings that will be available as a future publication.

A project of this scope is almost impossible without funding. Therefore, I would like to wholeheartedly thank Bath Spa University's School of Historical and Cultural Studies for their generous three-year dissertation fellowship. The Tārā-Foundation granted a one-year fellowship in order to complete this research. The final publication would not have been possible without the ITAS-Numata Research Fellowship that supports the publication of research on Mikyö Dorje and a forthcoming volume on the Sakya and Kagyü luminary Karma Thrinlepa (1456–1539); I would like to thank Pedro and Dorrit Gomez and Peter Gomez-Hansen for their help in this

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<sup>6</sup> "'Ocean of Marvelous Perfections": A 17th century *Padma'i thang yig* from the Sa-skyapa school,' in *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation*, ed. Jim Rheingans (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 139–181.

<sup>7</sup> The doctoral research 'The Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Incarnate: A Comprehensive Study of the Life and Works of Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524)' is carried out at the University of Bonn under the supervision of Peter Schwieger and the author's co-supervision.

matter. I would further like to thank the Buddhismus Stiftung Diamantweg for covering the printing costs for this volume.

Although at times carried out in retreat-like solitude, this work, as all research endeavours, did not emerge from the effort of a single individual but was only possible through the support of many colleagues and friends who are too numerous to mention. My deep gratitude goes to my supervisors David Jackson, Mahinda Deegalle, and Fiona Montgomery. Khenpo Karma Ngedön was extremely helpful in discussing matters of Tibetan language. I would like to extend special thanks to Burkhard Scherer for his encouragement in finding funding and his critical comments. Gene Smith and Burkhard Quessel were essential for inquiries about Tibetan sources at the outset of this research. I would like to thank the late Kunzig Shamarpa Mipham Chökyi Lodrö (1952–2014) and Maniwa Karma Sherab Gyaltzen Rinpoche for sharing their knowledge about Tibetan textual sources and doctrinal issues related to this research. Franz-Karl Ehrhard, Klaus-Dieter Mathes, Alexander Schiller, Frank Müller-Witte, Manfred Seegers, Maria Bjerregaard, Volker Caumanns, and Roger Jackson were always ready to share their erudite suggestions and comments. Denise Cush, Paul Davies, and the staff of Study of Religions at Bath Spa University along with Rupert Gethin, Paul Williams, and Rita Langer of Bristol University created a vibrant research environment and stimulating discussion during numerous World View Society talks, Graduate School seminars, and joint Postgraduate Conferences. I would like to acknowledge Anthony Bristow, John O'Donnel, Julian Schott, and Anna Rheingans for their expertise in different types of proofreading and Miroslav Hrdina for his knowledgeable and diligent support in technical and editorial issues. The series editors and the staff of the Projektverlag were very helpful during the process of publication. Finally, I would like to thank Andrea Dansauer, Anja-Karina Pahl, and Jeffrey Inwood for their general support during the process of this project. Of course all mistakes remain the author's responsibility. Naturally, there was a limit to incorporating further sources and literature; also, in retrospective, I would approach some of the issues differently.<sup>8</sup> I nevertheless hope that this contribution is a first step on the way for future research in the field of the Eighth Karmapa.

This book is structured as follows: Chapter One engages with previous research and justifies the methodologies employed. Chapter Two elaborates

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<sup>8</sup> The forthcoming volume on Mikyö Dorje's writings as an exemplary study of a Tibetan textual corpus will shed more light on the specific topic of textual transmissions and literary history.

key points of the Kagyüpa Great Seal and the religious and political contexts of the Eighth Karmapa. Chapter Three evaluates the main textual sources and genres used. Chapter Four delineates the Eighth Karmapa's development into one of the most renowned scholars and mystical teachers in his tradition and outlines his programme for teaching meditation. Chapter Five investigates concrete teaching situations in three case studies, showing divergent expressions of the Great Seal and their contexts. Chapter Six argues that the Great Seal is an independent instruction conveying the essence of the teachings, which can be taught as either tantric or non-tantric, and establishes the teacher as the main unifying spiritual element of Great Seal instructions and practices. Chapter Seven concludes by asserting the importance of contexts, such as genre and history, in the study of Buddhist mysticism.

## Conventions used

### Transliteration

Tibetan characters are transliterated according to the system of Turrel W. Wylie as laid out in ‘A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription’ (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 22 (1959), 261–267) in its extended form. When a Tibetan word is capitalised, the root letter is written in capitals. Two frequently used Tibetan titles were not transliterated: Karmapa and Dalai Lama. The Indian names that the Tibetan traditions added a *pa* are displayed in a more concise manner: Maitrī pa = Maitrīpa, Nāro pa = Nāropa.

Foreign language terms found in the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, second edition, revised (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) are not italicised. Sanskrit (written with diacritics): bodhisattva, dharma, saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, saṅgha, siddha, stūpa, sūtra, tantra; Tibetan: lama (except for occurrences in a name), Lhasa, Shigatse; Greek: topos.

### Referencing

The sources regarding the Eighth Karmapa are cited from the Tibetan standard edition of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, published 2000–2004. When a further edition of any text is used, the specific reference to this particular edition will be provided.



## Abbreviations

### *General Abbreviations*

<b><i>HR</i></b>	<i>History of Religion</i>
<b>IATS</b>	International Association of Tibetan Studies
<b>IITBS</b>	International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies
<b><i>JAOS</i></b>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<b><i>JIABS</i></b>	<i>Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies</i>
<b><i>JIATS</i></b>	<i>Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies</i>
<b><i>JIPh</i></b>	<i>Journal of Indian Philosophy</i>
<b><i>JTS</i></b>	<i>Journal of the Tibet Society</i>
<b>LTWA</b>	Library of Tibetan Works and Archives
<b>NGMPP</b>	Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project
<b>PIATS</b>	Proceedings of the Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies

### *Abbreviated Tibetan Texts*

If the abbreviation consists of words from the title of the source, the abbreviation is italicised. The abbreviation usually goes back to words within the title or to the author; for clarity original words are marked in bold.

***A khu A khra***

dGe slong Byang chub bzang po, **A khu a khra** (b. sixteenth century). *rGyal ba kun gyi dbang po dPal ldan karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i zhabs kyi dgung lo bdun phan gyi nam par thar pa nor bu'i phreng ba* [*The Spiritual Biography up to the Seventh Year of the Glorious Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje, the Mighty One of All Jinas: A Garland of Jewels*]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 33–106, 37 fols.

***'Bras spungs dkar chag***

'Bras spungs (Monastery) dPal brtsegs Bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang (eds.). **'Bras spungs dgon du bzhugs su gsol ba'i dpe rnying dkar chag** [*The List of Old Books which were Placed in the Monastery of 'Bras spungs*]. 2 vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe krung khang, 2005.

***Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa***

Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII (1507–1554). *dPal rgyal ba karma pa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i gsung 'bum* [*The Collected Works of Mi bskyod rdo rje, the Eighth Incarnation in the Line of the Glorious Victor Karmapa*]. 26 vols. Lhasa: dPal brtsegs Bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang, 2000–2004. Phyogs bsgrigs theng dang po [First edition]. (Printed from blocks kept at 'Bras spungs dGa' ldan Pho brang and Khams dPal spungs dgon, later reset electronically in Tibet. Distributed by the Tsadra Foundation, New York.)

***dKar chag***

dKon mehog 'bangs, Zhwa dmar V (1525–1583). *rGyal ba thams cad kyi ye shes kyi sku nam pa thams cad pa'i thugs can karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje bzhad pa'i gsung 'bum gyi dkar chag* [*The Table of Contents of the Collected Works of Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje bzhad pa, who has the Enlightened Mind which Consists of All Expressions of the Jñānakāya of All Jinas*]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 1–28, 14 fols.

***Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta***

*dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad dpal ldan dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal lung dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* [The Exposition of the Madhyamakāvatāra, Words of the Glorious Dus gsum mkhyen pa, Chariot of the Siddhas of the Dwags po-Lineage]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 14, pp. 1–975, 487 fols.

***gDams ngag mdzod***

Kong sprul bLo gros mtha' yas, 'Jam mgon (1813–1899) (ed.); Chandra, Lokesh (ed.) *gDams ngag mdzod: A Treasury of Instructions*. 12 vols. Delhi: N. Lungtog, N. Gyaltsan, 1971. (Reproduced from a Xylographic print from the dPal spungs blocks.)

***Kam tshang***

Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699/1700–1774) and 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab. *bKa' brgyud gser phreng rnam thar zla ba chu sel gyi phreng ba smad cha* (The Golden Garland of Kagyu Biographies, vol. 2). Sarnath: Vajra Vidya Institute Library, 2004. (Reprint of: *sGrub brgyud karma kam tshang brgyud pa rnam thar rin po che'i rnam par thar pa rab 'byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba*.)

***Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs***

Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII (1507–1554). *Byang phyogs 'di na karma pa/ rim par byon las bdun pa rang byung ni/ kun mkhyen chos rje'i slob mar gyur 'ga' yi/ bka' 'bangs mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* [The Succession of Deeds of Mi bskyod rdo rje. He obeys the Command of Some Students of the Omniscient Master, the Self Arisen Seventh among the Karmapas, who have appeared One after the Other (rim par) in this Northern Land]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 350–387, 19 fols.

***mKhas pa'i dga' ston***

gTsug lag phreng ba, dPa' bo II (1504–1566). *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* [History of Religion: A Feast for the Scholars]. 2 vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1986.

***Phag gru gsung 'bum***

Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170). *Dus gsum sangs rgyas thams cad kyi thugs rje'i rnam rol dpal ldan phag gru rdo rje rgyal po mchog gi gsung 'bum rin po che glegs bam*—The Collected Works of Phag mo gru pa. 9 vols. Kathmandu: Khenpo Shedub Tenzin and Lama Thinley Namgyal, 2003.

***Phag gru bka' 'bum***

Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170). *Phag mo'i gru pa'i bka' 'bum* [Collected Writings of Phag mo gru pa]. Manuscript edited by Kun dga' rin chen Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1475–1527) in 'Bri gung, 1507. 4 vols. NGMPP, Reel No. E 3169/1, E 3170/1, E 3171/1, 1998. (Photo-mechanical reproduction of a manuscript from the library of Che tsang Rinpoche in Byang chub gling, Dehradun.)

***Phyag chen mdzod***

Mi pham chos kyi blo gros, Zhwa dmar pa XIV (1952–2014) (ed.). *Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i khrid mdzod* [The Treasury of Meditation Instructions of the Great Seal, the Ultimate Meaning]. New Delhi, 1998. (Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center W 23447.)

***Q***

Suzuki, Daisetz T. (ed.). *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka: Peking Edition*. Tokyo, Kyoto: Tibetan Tripiṭaka Research Institute, 1955–1961.

***rGya gzhung***

Mi pham chos kyi blo gros, Zhwa dmar pa XIV (1952–2014) (ed.). *Phyag rgya chen po'i rgya gzhung* [The Indian Treatises of the Great Seal]. In *Phyag chen mdzod*, vols. *om*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*.

***Sangs rgyas dpal grub***

**Sangs rgyas dpal grub** (sixteenth century). *rGyal ba spyan ras gzigs dbang brgyad pa'i nam thar legs spyad ma'i don 'grel gsal ba'i sgron me* [The Spiritual Biography of the Jina Avalokiteśvara, the Mighty Eighth (Karmapa), a Commentary on the Meaning of (his) Good Deeds: Illuminating Light]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 150–329, 90 fols.

***Zhang Yisun***

**Zhang Yisun** et. al. (ed.). *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* [The Great Tibetan–Chinese Dictionary]. 2 vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Research into early Buddhism has indicated that communicating the experience of freedom from suffering to specific individuals has always been at the heart of the Buddha's teaching. He was interested in benefiting his students, not in creating a philosophical system in an ontological sense.<sup>1</sup> The Buddha's aim can thus be viewed as pedagogical rather than ontological.<sup>2</sup>

Close readings of Pāli textual material have demonstrated that analysing the contexts of the addressee and the prevalent Indian spiritual and intellectual traditions is crucial for understanding his teachings. Gombrich remarks: 'If we had a true record of the Buddha's words, I think we would find that during his preaching career of forty-five years he had expressed himself in an enormous number of different ways.'<sup>3</sup>

The Great Seal (Skt. *mahāmudrā*, Tib. *phyag rgya chen po*) instructions of the Eighth Karmapa, Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), contain such a number of varied expressions, and, more importantly, this vast corpus of textual witnesses was put into writing either during his life or shortly

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<sup>1</sup> Gombrich (1996: 7, 18, 37) and Scherer (2006b: 4) argue for a non-essentialist understanding of Buddhism. For the Buddha's emphasis on experience, see for example Gombrich (1996: 28). Schmithausen (1973a: 180–186 and 1976: 236–237) has indicated that Buddhist theories of *viññaptimātra* and *cittamātra* have emerged from spiritual practices such as 'reflection on visionary objects of meditation' (ibid. 249). For further studies on early Buddhism, see Vetter (1988), Gombrich (1988), Ruegg and Schmithausen (1990), Hoffman and Deegalle (1996), and Hamilton (2000).

<sup>2</sup> Scherer (2006b: 1) has coined the term 'andragogical'. This expression emphasises guidance for grown up beings rather than children (from Greek *aner*, genitive *andros* – 'man' rather than *pais* – 'boy, child' and *agogos* – 'guide').

<sup>3</sup> Gombrich (1996: 19). He also argues that the metaphors, allusions, and debates used by the Buddha were comprehended insufficiently by both the early Asian commentators and Western academics (for example the word *dhamma* and Brahmanical concept of *dharma* on ibid. 34–38; for better understanding Buddhist *dharma* theory through non-Buddhist contexts, see Bronkhorst 1985: 318–319). Not all Gombrich's theses are unproblematic and, at times, lack textual evidence, although his thought-provoking ideas have been acknowledged (see the review by Maitrimurti and von Rospatt 1998: 174).

thereafter. Specific genres containing Great Seal instructions constitute valuable sources for achieving insight into the bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal as a pragmatic heuristic suited to the students' differing capacities and inclinations.

Among Buddhist traditions, those of Tibet perhaps stand out most for their blend of meditative systems, centred on various instructions (*gdams ngag*) and their lineages. They were considered to have their origin with the Buddha, being transmitted via a teacher through a line of closely associated students.<sup>4</sup> Also well-known are the illustrious masters of these lineages, eccentric *yogins* or *yoginīs*, reincarnate lamas, and religio-political leaders.<sup>5</sup>

The Great Seal practised in the various bKa' brgyud lineages is one such meditative technique. In essence, the Great Seal of the bKa' brgyud pa contains immediate instructions for achieving Buddhahood by transcending conceptual thinking (Skt. *prapañca*, *vikalpa*) and directly perceiving the nature of mind.<sup>6</sup> Tibetan meditation masters of the bKa' brgyud lineages claim that the Great Seal and its practice reveal the ultimate truth behind all teachings. They maintain that the Great Seal contains the 'hidden meaning' of the doctrines of *sūtra* and *tantra* of the Tibetan canon.<sup>7</sup>

The bKa' brgyud traditions in medieval Tibet believed that it was Nāropa who was the main transmitter of the Great Seal within tantric practice and yogic exercise (later called *tantra* or *mantra* Great Seal), whereas they held that Maitrīpa and Saraha also taught the Great Seal

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<sup>4</sup> The late nineteenth century masters of the non-sectarian movement, such as Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899), have distinguished eight instruction lineages (see Kapstein 1996, 2007: 116). Most of the lineages originating from the new translation period are based on instructional texts which have a mystic origin as oral 'vajra verses' (*rdo rje'i tshig rkang*) that were later put into writing. Davidson (2004: 149–151) has termed some of them 'gray texts'. He has argued that they emerged from the collaboration of Indian scholars and Tibetan translators and present the unfolding of the esoteric traditions in a new environment.

<sup>5</sup> For the reception of Tibet in the West and the related imaginations, see, for example, Donald Lopez's *Prisoners of Shangrila* (1998) and its critique by Germano (2005: 165–167). See also Huber (1997) and Dodin (2001: 1–32).

<sup>6</sup> Beyer (1975: 148) has distinguished three kinds of Mahāyāna Buddhist meditation technique: standard (insight and calm abiding), visionary and ecstatic (the stages of tantric meditation) and spontaneous techniques. Among these, the Great Seal of the bKa' brgyud pa—or at least some facets of it—can be described as a 'spontaneous' technique of enlightenment.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the fifteenth-century scholar Karma 'phrin las pa I, Phyogs las mnam rgyal, *Dris lan*, p. 136, and the translation of the *Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā* (*Phyag chen zla ba'i 'od zer*) Namgyal (1986: 97–116). Also see contemporary traditional commentaries, such as Thrangu Rinpoche (2004).

outside tantric contexts. Such an approach was propagated by sGam po pa (1079–1153).<sup>8</sup>

Though often considered a primarily meditation-orientated lineage, the bKa' brgyud pa traditions have produced numerous scholars.<sup>9</sup> Among them, the Eighth Karmapa was considered one of the most learned masters within the Karma bKa' brgyud sub-school, which enjoyed great support from the most powerful rulers of Tibet from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries (particularly the period of 1498–1517/18).<sup>10</sup> The Seventh Karmapa, Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506), had initiated an own sūtra exegetical tradition of the great treatises within his sect during a period of growing systematisation.<sup>11</sup> This scholastic trend was enhanced by the Eighth Karmapa, whose agenda included commenting on four of the five main non-tantric subjects.<sup>12</sup> He was a prolific writer on tantric Buddhist and other traditional fields of knowledge, and his oeuvre fills more than thirty volumes.

Previous academic research has concentrated mainly on his well-known scholastic commentaries such as those on the *Madhyamakāvatāra* and *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, and the *gZhan stong legs par smra ba'i sgron me* (*The Light which Expresses the gZhan stong [Doctrine] Well*).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For sGam po pa's Great Seal, see Kragh (1998: 12–26) and Sherpa (2004: 129–184).

<sup>9</sup> Over the course of history, the various bKa' brgyud schools have oscillated between scholastic institutionalisation and mystic reform. In the bKa' brgyud lineages, this particularly refers to the movement of the 'crazy yogins' (*smyon pa*), which is briefly described by Smith (2001: 59–61) and Stein (1993: 170–172). See also Kögler (2004: 25–55), who suggests that this movement emerged due to social factors such as the absence of central political authority and the important role of the clergy. Recent publications on this topic are Stefan Larsson, 'The Birth of a Heruka: How Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan became Gtsang smyon Heruka: A Study of a Mad Yogin' (Phd. diss., Stockholm University, 2009) and David Di Valerio, *The Holy Madmen of Tibet* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> From 1498 to 1518 the Rin spungs pa lords, supporters of the Seventh Karmapa and the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, ruled over dBus and gTsang with an iron fist (Jackson, D. 1989a: 29–30). The Eighth Karmapa witnessed the transmission from relative peace and strong central rule to increasing instability, especially in dBus, culminating in the period of great unrest in the late 1540s.

<sup>11</sup> He composed the only Karma bKa' brgyud work on Pramāṇa (Chos grags rgya mtsho, Karmapa VII, *Tshad ma'i bstan bcos*).

<sup>12</sup> Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, Prajñāparāmitā, Vinaya, and Pramāṇa (see Brunnhölzl 2004: 19).

<sup>13</sup> For previous academic research on the Eighth Karmapa, see the literature review in this chapter.



Though Great Seal teachings form the heart of his tradition's religious instructions, and though the Eighth Karmapa is considered one of the most distinguished scholars within his school, no one has academically investigated the Eighth Karmapa's life or how he taught the Great Seal to his students. The recent publication of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, the largest part of his writings, has also not yet been taken into account.

### *1.1 Aim and Scope of this Research*

This thesis argues that analysing the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal teachings through studying particular textual genres in their historical, doctrinal, and literary contexts, reveals a certain pedagogical pragmatism in relation to specific students. This suggests that, analogous to findings about early Buddhist meditation, the bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal instructions are better viewed as a pragmatic heuristic, emerging from the dynamics of the teacher-student interaction in its various contexts. This thesis provides the historical context of the Eighth Karmapa's life, demonstrating that he was one of the most significant scholars of his school, next to the Third Karmapa, and adept in its highest meditational instruction. Thus, the primary objective of this research is to investigate for the first time the Eighth Karmapa's life and selected Great Seal teachings, examining how he lived, studied the Great Seal, and taught it to specific students in a variety of contexts.

As will be illustrated in the literature review, the small amount of Great Seal research done embarked upon the necessary tasks of analysing its terminology, doctrinal development, and systematisation. However, because meditation and realisation are central to the traditions in which it is practised, it may be difficult to pin down the Great Seal to any single doctrinal system. And, beyond doctrinal debates and systematisations, it is the interaction between teacher and student that forms the core of Great Seal practice and teaching. Therefore, research into Great Seal traditions may also benefit from a close contextual and historical investigation, concentrating on the teacher and his instructions, that takes into account differences in both textual genres and practitioners.

In order to do so, particular textual genres were chosen. 'Spiritual biographies' (*mam thar*) and 'spiritual memoirs' (*rang mam*) are used in analysing the historical, cultural, and political contexts of the Karmapa's life, with an emphasis on his roles as scholarly monk, mystical teacher, and

influential political figure.<sup>14</sup> With regard to the Great Seal, the study focuses on its (bKa' brgyud specific) teaching and practice as expressed in dialogues found in a spiritual biography (*rnam thar*), question and answer texts (Tib. *dris lan*), meditation instructions (*khrid*), esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), and pieces of advice (*bslab bya*) written by the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>15</sup>

These genres offer valuable prospects for investigating Great Seal practice and its contexts. Questions and answers often contain short treatments of doctrinal questions loaded with meaning. Genres such as meditation instructions, esoteric precepts, and advices have similar special qualities, since they aim at condensing the Buddhist teachings to the essential points and conveying these points efficiently for practice. Such a goal can also be encouraged by teachings presented as dialogues within the spiritual biographies of the Eighth Karmapa.

At first, selected instances from these textual genres are examined in detailed case studies. Then the Great Seal teaching and the Karmapa's interpretations of it are contextualised, focusing on non-tantric Great Seal and the role of the teacher. Most sources employed are taken from the recently published *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* in twenty-six volumes. The scope of this research therefore includes the necessary historical survey, and Chapter Three is devoted entirely to evaluating the textual sources and genres in detail.

This thesis is thus not centrally a philosophical or doctrinal study, but an attempt to cover new ground in researching the life and writings of the Eighth Karmapa, examining particular teaching situations as documented in different textual genres, with a focus on Great Seal instruction and practice. It interprets a number of previously unstudied Tibetan language sources, and also offers a means by which to approach such an undertaking: its method of case studies in context.

Naturally, every study has its limits in both time and scope. Given the sheer bulk of the textual material, this research cannot take all writings within the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* into full account (though

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<sup>14</sup> In *Civilized Shamans* (1993: 12–22) and *Tantric Revisionings* (2005: 13–17), Geoffrey Samuel has used slightly different dimensions, using the terms 'clerical' and 'shamanic'.

<sup>15</sup> Here, the main textual genres are briefly introduced in order to illustrate their suitability for this thesis; they are treated in more detail in Chapter Three (3.3, 3.4). Although these genres hold a central place in Tibetan Buddhist life and culture, they have not yet been thoroughly studied. *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, edited by Cabezón and Jackson (1996) does not study the question and answer genres. It includes a treatment of the slightly related genres of the graded teachings (*bstan rim*) (Jackson, D. 1996: esp. 241–243) and instructions (*gdams ngag*) (Kapstein 1996: 275).

every text has been surveyed). Also, the focus must be limited to the main events of his life and to selected shorter instructions focusing mainly on the Great Seal of Saraha, Maitrīpa, and sGam po pa. However, a broader doctrinal context of some of the Karmapa's other treatises, as well as the historical and religious context will be considered where possible.

## 1.2 Methodologies Employed

Scholars in Buddhist Studies have only recently started to debate their methodological claims, derived primarily from philology and history.<sup>16</sup> The shift of paradigm or 'linguistic turn' in the humanities did not leave Buddhist and Tibetan Studies unchallenged.<sup>17</sup> Still, even otherwise excellent academic works in Tibetan Buddhist Studies are sometimes written in the complete absence of any explicitly stated methodology.<sup>18</sup> Within the debates in the field, Cabezón has suggested a mutual and critical understanding of philological and critical perspectives.<sup>19</sup>

In this thesis, it is held that methodologies should be suited to the sources and aims of the research. Considering mutual understanding as suggested by Cabezón in accordance with the demands of this thesis, it utilises different methodological approaches to varying degrees: it is prima-

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<sup>16</sup> Gomez (1995: 183).

<sup>17</sup> The *JlABS* vol. 18 (1995) contains various papers dedicated to theories in Buddhist Studies; see Gomez (1995: 193–196) for the ideas of 'higher criticism' in Buddhist Studies, and Cabezón (1995: 243–246) for some stereotypes of Buddhist scholars' theories. There have also been attempts at creating an academic 'Buddhist Theology' (see Jackson and Makransky 2003). For a discussion of 'New Cultural History', see Hunt (1989: 21–22). For a defence and debate of history in light of challenging the idea of objective knowledge 'outside the text' (*déhors texte*), or knowledge about the past, see, for example, Evans (1997: 94–96).

<sup>18</sup> For example, in his ground breaking *Mipham's Dialectics and the Debates on Emptiness*, Phuntsho (2005: 19–20) exposes his method only in passing. His work offers an impressive exploration in the field of Mipham Namgyal and his *Madhyamaka*. In a short paragraph called 'Sources and methodological considerations' (ibid. 19), he claims to undertake a thematic treatment of the debates on emptiness relying on crucial texts. He adds that his 'role in presenting this is no more than that of the commentator of a football match, giving both a narrative account and an analytic treatment of the philosophical contest that took place between Mipham and the dGe lugs pa opposition' (ibid.).

<sup>19</sup> Cabezón (1995: 251). Though Marwick (2001: 18, 136, 266–273) has argued that to combine historical and cultural approaches may be confusing, this thesis holds with Cabezón that one can use both, if done carefully. Biersack (1989: 73–86) reviews influences of Geertz on history and anthropology, suggesting that a certain multidimensionality may unite those approaches (ibid. 96).

rily grounded on the philological and historical methodologies. In doing so, it takes a phenomenological perspective of ‘ad hoc hermeneutics’ on religion and religious texts, where one tries to understand and interpret a religious tradition in its own terms, attempting to interpret it ‘both sympathetically and critically’.<sup>20</sup> Occasionally, modern and post-modern literary theories such as intertextuality and narratology are employed for comprehending the genre of spiritual biographies (*rnam thar*).<sup>21</sup>

As this thesis strives to contribute to knowledge about past religious practices and their contexts on the basis of Tibetan textual sources, use of historical and philological methodologies is indispensable. In Tibetan Buddhist Studies, many areas have yet to be studied and many artefacts have already been destroyed. Most textual sources are untranslated, and many remain undiscovered. However, there is a large, and still growing, bulk of available textual material. The *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* consist of twenty-six volumes containing over two-hundred and fifty texts. Works of the Karmapa’s contemporaries have also yet to be studied extensively by scholars, and those sources on non-religious issues are often missing altogether. The nature of the classical Tibetan language along with the poor quality of dictionaries impedes the linguistic and cultural understanding of texts, demanding, at times, the skills of a lexicographer. Exhaustive encyclopaedias and bibliographies are not available.

Research into medieval Tibetan Buddhism, therefore, requires considerable philological and historical work, and this thesis heavily employs these approaches. Primarily for surveying, dating, and critically evaluating the Tibetan textual sources and their authorship, as well as reading and translating them when necessary.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Green (2005: 406); see also *ibid.* 404–406 and below. In his study of the Great Seal instructions of Zhang, Martin (1992: 244–253) has emphasised that a meditation-centred system like the Great Seal needs to be understood with its own voice.

<sup>21</sup> In his *Moderne Literaturtheorie und Antike Texte*, Schmitz (2002) describes how modern literary theory was applied to classical texts (see *ibid.* 55–75, for narratology and *ibid.* 91–99, for intertextuality). For applications of narratology see also Scherer (2006c: 2–7); for narratology, see Bal (1997) and Stanzel (1995). For a further attempt at analysing hagiographies including Tibetan *rnam thar* with in part narratological methods, see Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans, ‘Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: An Introduction,’ in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*, ed. *ibid.* (Berlin: EB-Verlag), 7–19 and the ‘Outlook’ (in *ibid.* 305–309) as well as the papers contained.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Historical’ is understood in the sense of doing source-based history without *a priori* theories. ‘Philological’ means, in this context, that passages are translated with philological precision and an astute awareness of the meanings of terms and their contexts. For such a

Translation and doing history are directly connected to interpretation. The textual hermeneutics, how to interpret a text and its context, and how to present the findings adequately, need to be briefly addressed. Since this research deals with texts and practices from a different culture, it intends to initially approach the religious ideas and concepts of genre from an empathic perspective, particularly when dealing with the Karmapa's interpretations of the Great Seal.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the thesis aims at an emic reading of both text and religious practices, attempting an undistorted *Verstehen*. It tries to understand texts, contexts, and religious practices using categories and terms employed by the tradition.<sup>24</sup>

Subsequently, the findings will be critically analysed and contextualised. As was indicated previously, the general approach is to investigate the Great Seal teaching of the Eighth Karmapa as expressed to specific students in its historical, doctrinal, and literary contexts. Firstly therefore, the thesis provides the context of the Eighth Karmapa's religious career.<sup>25</sup>

For examining the teachings to different students, a presentation in the form of case studies with a clear focus is chosen.<sup>26</sup> While relying on a dialogue, a question and answer text, and two meditation instructions, the presentation alternates between translation of crucial passages and analysis of historical context and doctrinal content. This is advantageous for the

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historical approach that attempts to uncover knowledge about the past, see, for example, the basic assumptions of Marwick (2001: xv, 3–4, 17–20). With regard to the importance of philology, Tillemans (1995: 277) states: 'Buddhist Studies insufficiently grounded upon, lacking, or even contemptuous of philology is an unpalatable, albeit increasingly likely, prospect for the future. It would add insult to injury if mediocre scholars justified or hastened this unfortunate turn of events by invoking postmodern buzzwords.' In *Religion: The Basics* (2003: 162), Nye comments: 'The answer may be to not trust any translation but one's own, and so to read the text in its original language (in this case Sanskrit). For in-depth study of a particular religious tradition and culture this is essential—it is not enough to rely on any person's translation, the student is expected to learn the language(s) of the original.' For a specific philological approach, see also Sheldon Pollock, 'Philology in Three Dimensions' (*postmedieval* v. 5.4, 2014). For the importance and difficulty of translating terms accurately, see Dreyfus (2001: 168–169).

<sup>23</sup> See Cabezón (2000: 234–240): a short article which discusses authorship in medieval Buddhist Tibet.

<sup>24</sup> Ruegg (1995: 157) has argued that it is important to try to assume an emic position: 'trying to place ourselves in the cultural contexts and intellectual horizons of the traditions we are studying, making use of their own intellectual and cultural categories and seeking as it were to "think along" with these traditions.' See also Green (2005: 404).

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed analysis of the genre and the sources, see Chapter Three (3.3, 3.4). For further information, colophons of the Eighth Karmapa's writings and title lists (*dkar chag*) are used.

<sup>26</sup> With its focus on practice and diverse contexts, this approach bears some similarities to the one chosen by the Princeton Readings in Religion (Lopez 2000: v).

purpose of this book and well suited for research that represents the first foray into previously unstudied sources. Ample evidence on a particular religious teaching, its addressee and teacher is gathered, focused upon and interpreted, thus providing, as it were, a ‘thick description’.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, sole fixation on scripture and the doctrinal system is avoided; a tendency that was indicated by Gomez or Schopen.<sup>28</sup> Though, in the case of the Eighth Karmapa, archaeological or art historical evidence is not at hand, this thesis uses the textual sources (as much as they allow) for the purpose of exploring contexts within and beyond normative doctrines.

To enrich the examination, the genre of spiritual biographies and its religious function will, at times, be combined with tools from narratology. Narratology itself has not been used in Tibetan studies, although some of it appears to be particularly suitable for the analysis of spiritual biographies. An example of coming to terms with Buddhist religious phenomena through the help of narratology is Ohnuma’s analysis of the gift of body in Indian Buddhist literature.<sup>29</sup>

In the enterprise of historical and narratological analysis one must be careful to neither construct an artificial alterity of Tibetan culture and

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<sup>27</sup> This famous term coined in *The Interpretation of Cultures* by Geertz (1973: 10, 15–16, 29) is here understood in a metaphorical sense; yet, the concept of concentrating on a selected phenomenon and interpreting it remains. However, no broader generalisations about Tibetan religion or culture are derived from it. For a discussion of this method in the context of cultural history, see also Biersack (1989: 73–80); for its criticism, see Crapanzano (1986: 74). In ‘Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians’, Walters (1980: 551), despite a certain criticism, considers Geertz’s attention to particular phenomena a strength.

<sup>28</sup> Gomez (1995: 192–196) has pointed out that much of Buddhist Studies, and its search for ‘truth’, is based on the written scriptural word and the doctrinal system. Schopen (1997: 7) has argued that most scholars in Indian Buddhist Studies have tended to overemphasise literary sources, pointing towards archaeological evidence. Huntington (2007: 218–219), critically evaluating Schopen’s approach, reduced it to an opposition of ‘Buddhist normative doctrine’ versus ‘Buddhist popular practice’, which is not much different from nineteenth-century sociologists like Durkheim. See Huntington (2007: 207–227), for a discussion of the approaches of Schmithausen (1981), Vetter (1988), Gombrich (1988), and Ruegg and Schmithausen (1990). Barret (2005: 126–128) has pointed out that the term ‘history’ has no sanctioned form in most of the Buddhist religious traditions studied and a dubious status in recent academic scholarship.

<sup>29</sup> Ohnuma (1998: 324, 335–346) examines what she calls ‘gift of body stories’ *dehadāna* and the literalisation of metaphors through analysis of narratives. An example of a balanced methodology, including similar critical approaches, would be Wedemeyer’s brief analysis of metaphors of impurity in the Buddhist tantras. He carefully uses critical and philological approaches to show that the antinomian elements in the Buddhist tantras reflect ‘concerns native to mainstream Indian religion’ (Wedemeyer 2007: 1). Cabezón (2000: 234–240) and Scherer (2006d: 75–76) combine critical and philological approaches in a balanced manner.

literature (which will make it impossible to analyse beyond the normative tradition), nor to disregard any substantial cultural, religious, and historical differences (which may lead to entirely adventurous readings). This thesis will thus not employ the extreme relativism that any reading might be valid.<sup>30</sup> The textual complexity and history are examined in detail. The genres and the religious experiences and interpretations expressed therein are related to the Karmapa's life and interpreted in light of Buddhist practice and culture in Tibet.<sup>31</sup>

Although this thesis aims at a close reading and an emic understanding, combined with a critical awareness, the researcher is aware of the limitations of any method and believes that any research is bound to be subjective to an extent. How texts are read, translated, and understood is coloured by the researcher's cultural background, ideas, and his or her methodology.<sup>32</sup> It is thus important to keep in mind that any of the writings about the Eighth Karmapa will always be a presentation belonging to our time and culture; one can only attempt to interpret how the texts were read by another culture in another age.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, when aiming at either empathic or objective understanding, reflexivity of the scholar, along with a clear statement of methodology and sources, is important.

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<sup>30</sup> Gombrich (1996: 7, 159). An example of a slightly adventurous reading is Bjerken (2005). He has drawn from Jonathan Z. Smith's theories of locative religion and ritual in order to study the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* in Tibet. Though his reading offers interesting ideas about methodology (ibid. 816–821), it largely remains theoretical speculation without much reference to sources apart from a translation of the tantra by Skorupski (1983). In his much more substantial *Buddhism and Deconstruction: Towards a Comparative Semiotics*, Wang (2001), according to O'Leary, sometimes reads postmodern ideas into the terms *samatā* and *dharmatā* of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra literature (ibid. 7, 152, and 167; see the review by O'Leary 2004). These attempts isolate certain passages as ontological statements, interpreting them with postmodern theories. Mills (2007: 3–5) critically discusses academic readings of the myth of the supine demoness for the founding of the first Tibetan temple. Orientalism in its 'classical' sense does not apply in the case of Tibet. For a certain kind of 'positive Orientalism' as often found in the reception of Tibet, see the references in this chapter, n. 5, and Dreyfus (2005b).

<sup>31</sup> Examples are Jackson, D. (1987), who has studied Buddhist scholarly debate in the *mKhas 'jug* of Sa skya Paṇḍita; and Stearns (1999), for his study of Dolpopa's *gzhan stong* theories. In the realm of Great Seal studies, the PhD dissertation of Sherpa (2004) on sGam po pa has similarities to the style of this research. In his *Three Vow Theories in Tibetan Buddhism*, Sobisch (2002a) presents differing standpoints over the centuries in both historical and doctrinal contexts. In *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Cuevas (2003) states that finally 'questions of historical contexts must always prevail' (ibid. 215).

<sup>32</sup> See for example Feyerabend (1980: 52–75), for the relativity of methods.

<sup>33</sup> See Kragh (1998: 9). Although I do not follow his approach in that texts should not be interpreted through biographical evidence.

A brief note on the collaboration with Tibetan scholars: although the Great Seal is primarily intended to be practised in meditation, this research is limited to exploring its specific textual witnesses. Through occasional consultation with Tibetan scholars the understanding will be further enhanced, especially in describing the reception and use of the texts today. For this, an empathic as well as critical approach was adopted.<sup>34</sup> Here, it should be remarked that, in the case of Tibetan Studies, the insider/outsider problem is often blurred: insiders can be critical and outsiders have shown to be methodologically naïve and vice versa.<sup>35</sup> Recently, some scholars have sought to abandon the insider/outsider dichotomy altogether for a view in which everyone is a co-participant in the formulation of a narrative about religion.<sup>36</sup>

In light of these discussions, it is clear that the research can never truly claim to show objectively ‘The Great Seal of the Eighth Karmapa’ as practised in medieval Tibet. It will nevertheless strive to understand and interpret the Great Seal of the Eighth Karmapa in its specific textual sources and contexts with the methods stated above, thus contributing to our knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, its history, and its practices.

### *1.3 Previous Research on the Life and Works of the Eighth Karmapa*

Although the Eighth Karmapa was a thought-provoking figure, important to the whole of medieval Tibetan Buddhism, previous scholarship on his life and works has been limited. No research has yet fully taken into account the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, published 2000–2004. Prior to this publication, scholars were forced to rely on Tibetan textual sources published during the 1960s and 70s.<sup>37</sup> But even with regards to this earlier material, only the surface has been scratched and some literature is inadequate in its treatment of the subject.

In terms of secondary literature on the Eighth Karmapa’s life, Gregor Verhufen (1995) provides the only academic study in his Master’s thesis ‘Die Biographien des Achten Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje und seines Lehrers Sangs rgyas mnyan pa’ [‘The Biographies of the Eighth Karmapa

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<sup>34</sup> In the collection *Buddhist Translations: Problems and Perspectives* edited by Doboorn (2001), leading scholars such as Ruegg (2001: 79–80) have emphasised the importance of collaboration with Tibetan scholars from the tradition for reading Tibetan texts.

<sup>35</sup> For severe criticisms of the Tibetan form of government, see Sobisch (2002b).

<sup>36</sup> Knott (2005: 245–246).

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter Three (at the end of 3.1).



and his Teacher Sangs rgyas mnyan pa']. Verhufen has focused mainly on the Karmapa's relationship to his most important teacher, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa (1445/1457–1510/1525). He rightly recognises Sangs rgyas mnyan pa as one of the most important influences on the Eighth Karmapa, and has carried out philological and historical research in order to document this crucial dynamic of the teacher-student relationship in Vajrayāna Buddhism.<sup>38</sup> He has then used the older *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (composed between 1545 and 1565) as the main source for translating episodes from the life of Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.<sup>39</sup>

With regard to the Eighth Karmapa's life, he has critically edited and translated the passage on the pre-birth and birth of the Eighth Karmapa, as found in Situ Paṅ chen's *Kaṃ tshang*, composed in 1715. He summarised the remainder of the Eighth Karmapa's life as documented in the same source.<sup>40</sup> This summary has served as a useful aid, as it allows a first overview on the basis of a Tibetan source. The annotations and appendices are especially helpful.<sup>41</sup> Aside from this, Verhufen has not drawn from the older *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, composed by one of the Eighth Karmapa's students, not to mention the spiritual biographies from the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, which were not available to him.<sup>42</sup>

Verhufen has correctly indicated the historical and scholastic importance of the Eighth Karmapa, and delineated the main phases of his development. However, while it is present in his sources, he basically overlooked the detail of there being two candidates for the title of Eighth

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<sup>38</sup> Verhufen (1995: 46) correctly remarks: 'Nur der eigene Lehrer, "der spirituelle Freund" (*Kalyāṇamitra*), weiß, welche Lehren für den Schüler (tib. *slob ma*) angemessen sind' (Only one's teacher, the spiritual friend (*Kalyāṇamitra*), knows which teachings are suitable for the student (Tib. *slob ma*)).

<sup>39</sup> Verhufen (1995: 53–75).

<sup>40</sup> The translation and Tibetan text are found in *ibid.* 75–80; the summary follows on pages 80–89.

<sup>41</sup> See the notes in *ibid.* 90–100 and, for example, note 93 on the relation to the Chinese emperor. Some referencing remains inadequate: though he mentions the Karmapa's place of passing away as Dwags po bshad grub gling, no exact page references are given (*ibid.* 88). The list of visions of the Eighth Karmapa along with indices to places and names in *Kaṃ tshang* (Verhufen 1995: 104–131) are a most welcome contribution and bear testimony to Verhufen's diligence in researching primary sources.

<sup>42</sup> Previously, two published Tibetan sources were available dealing with the Eighth Karmapa's life: dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (composed between 1545 and 1565 and published in 1961 and 1986) and the slightly shorter *History of the Karma bKa' brgyud pa Sect* composed by Si tu Paṅ chen and his student Belo in 1715 (published in 1968, 1972 and 1990). Verhufen uses only the latter for his academic study of the Eighth Karmapa's life (Verhufen 1995: 18, 75–103).

Karmapa. This research focuses on this issue as a significant factor in the Eighth Karmapa's development and advances knowledge by taking into account the newly available spiritual biography composed by A khu a khra.<sup>43</sup>

In the appendix, Verhufen lists the Karmapa's works as found in the *Shes bya'i gter mdzod* and adds useful geographical information in the index.<sup>44</sup> Verhufen's Master's thesis presents the most extensive scholarly treatment of the Eighth Karmapa's life; the fact that he did not draw from the older (available) *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* and that his contribution is largely descriptive is no shortcoming with regard to the aims of his study. Further, an MA thesis is only the beginning of research. This book attempts to advance research by further exploring the Eighth Karmapa's religious career and its historical contexts on the basis of significant early sources. Additionally, they are approached with different research foci: his becoming a scholar and his study and teaching of the Great Seal.

In 'The Karmapa Sect: A Historical Note', Hugh Richardson, one of the most renowned British Tibetologists, briefly mentions the Eighth Karmapa. Richardson focuses on his relation to the Chinese Emperor, Wu-tsung. To that end, he has appended a translation of a letter of invitation from the Chinese Emperor to the Eighth Karmapa; a rare document found at the Karmapa's main seat in Central Tibet, mTshur phu.<sup>45</sup> Though some of

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<sup>43</sup> Verhufen (1995: 31) introduces the Eighth Karmapa as an outstanding personality. In a footnote, he then quotes (ibid. 31 n. 51) the *Karmapa Papers* edited by Nesterenko (1992: 7), where the Tibetan scholar sTobs dga' Rin po che rightly mentions that there were two candidates for the title of Eighth Karmapa. Verhufen (ibid.) asserts that he has not found this story confirmed in any available spiritual biography known to him at the time. Reference to this fact, however, can be found in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, which Verhufen himself draws on heavily (Verhufen 1995: 53–72) and in his own work in a footnote to Stein (1972: 147) (ibid. 96, n. 59). *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* p. 1215: "At that time there was a Lama A mdo ba, with quite some capacity for stubbornness. With regard to his own son that was born, too, good dream signs appeared to the parents; and based on this [A mdo ba] made his son practice various teaching and trainings, and [the boy] became known as the magical emanation (*sprul sku*) of the Omniscient One; and they stayed in the encampment. Pleasing the encampment inhabitants (*sgar pa*) with food and beer (*chang*) [A mdo ba] made them partial (towards his son)." 'di'i dus bla ma a mdo ba rgod rlabs can zhig gis khong rang gi bu zhig byung ba la'ang pha ma la rmi ltas [p. 1216] bzang po byung ba la rten nas bu la bslab sbyang yang du ma byas nas thams cad mkhyen pa'i sprul skur grags te brag gsum na bzhugs/ *sgar pa phal cher yang chang gis mgu bar bgyis nas phyogs su lung bar byas/*. It is well documented in A khu A khra and other sources published later and used in this dissertation (Chapter Three (3.4) and Chapter Four (4.1.2, 4.1.3)).

<sup>44</sup> Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang (ed.), *Bod gangs can gyi grub mtha'*.

<sup>45</sup> Richardson (1980: 347–350) briefly discusses the Karmapa's invitation to China and its conflicting portrayal in Chinese dGe lugs and bKa' brgyud pa sources. This article was first

Richardson's assertions are a bit outdated, his account of Sino-Tibetan relations and his historical guesses are still remarkable and provide some contextual information for this research.<sup>46</sup>

There are two traditional accounts of the Eighth Karmapa's life published earlier. In *Black Hat Lama*, Nick Douglas and Meryl White (1976) write four pages on his life.<sup>47</sup> Their description is basic and lacking any references or critical investigation, though it evinces certain details.<sup>48</sup> It is embedded in a collection of spiritual biographies (*rnam thar*) in which the lives of all the Karmapas are presented in a traditional way. In spite of its brevity, this account is the first Western publication dealing with the Eighth Karmapa's life, and on the whole it offers useful insights into the incarnation lineage of the Karmapas.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, the reader finds a translation of a well-used meditation in the appendix: *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal 'byor* (*The Meditation on the Lama in Four Sessions*).<sup>50</sup> Both authors worked together with Tibetan scholar Karma 'phrin las pa (b. 1931) under the guidance of the Sixteenth Karmapa, Rang byung rig pa'i rdo rje (1923–1981).

In *The Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet*, Karma Thinley (Wylie: 'phrin las) (1980) uses similar Tibetan sources and summarises their content more extensively.<sup>51</sup> His work is written from a purely traditional perspective, seeking to inspire openness and trust in the Buddhist practitioner. The summary of the Eighth Karmapa's life is only four pages long and contains no citation of sources, though it is made clear from the appendix that they stem from the spiritual biography (*rnam thar*) and history of religion (*chos*

published in 1976; this thesis uses a reprint from 1980. The translation of the letter is located on pages 363–366, while the Tibetan text itself is on 375–376.

<sup>46</sup> He says, for example, that after a large Chinese party had tried to invite the Karmapa in 1521, he declined and 'the young lama was hurriedly moved to central Tibet' (ibid. 349). But according to the sources studied in this research the Eighth Karmapa only approached central Tibetan dBus in 1537 (*Kam tshang*, p. 339; see also Chapter Four (4.1.5, 4.1.6)). It is possible that Richardson has referred to Kong po or Dwags po as 'Central Tibet,' an imprecision which might explain his wording.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas and White (1976: 86–90).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 91, n. 52 at least remarks on the presence of the 'shorter instructions' (*khrid thung*); see also Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gDams khrid man ngag* (1976 edition).

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the introduction in Douglas and White (1976: 17–40).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 243–253. This text was later co-translated by the researcher from Tibetan to German (see Rheingans and Müller Witte (trans.) 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Thinley (1980: 89–96).

'byung) genres.<sup>52</sup> Thinley is a Tibetan scholar and meditation teacher from the bKa' brgyud and Sa skya traditions. In the introduction, Stott signals the Eighth Karmapa's importance. And Reginald R. Ray attests to the spiritual functions of the 'magic' and 'visionary' aspect of spiritual biographies: 'Magic is then, in Tibetan Buddhist Tradition, the handmaiden of enlightenment.'<sup>53</sup> However, Thinley's account lacks historical detail and critical analysis.

The above works represent all historical research carried out on the Eighth Karmapa's life.<sup>54</sup> Some have methodological weaknesses and omit important primary sources. The valuable spiritual biographies from the recently published *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* were not available to them. Furthermore, they contain minor errors: Thinley claims the Eighth Karmapa was founder or inspiration for a tradition of Tibetan painting style typical of many later bKa' brgyud painted-scrolls, known as karma encampment style (*karma sgar 'bris*). It is not clear from which sources they make this assertion, but David Jackson has shown convincingly that in fact the Ninth Karmapa's student, Nam mkha' bkra shis, was responsible for the style.<sup>55</sup>

As will be shown below, academic literature on the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal is inadequate. Research explicitly discussing the theory and practice of his Great Seal is virtually non-existent, and no one has dealt with the shorter meditation instructions published in 1976, or the various question and answer texts and advices found in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.<sup>56</sup> The few academic studies which take his Great Seal into account are mainly based on the Karmapa's *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* (*Chariot of the Siddhas of the Dwags po Lineage*), a commentary on the

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<sup>52</sup> He summarises them only briefly. His sources are: dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba, *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*; Si tu Paṅ chen and 'Be lo, *Kaṃ tshang*; Padma dkar po, *Tibetan Chronicle*; Nges don bstan rgyas, *Karma pa sku 'phreng gyi rnam thar*; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, and the modern continuation of Situ's work sTobs dga' rin po che's *bKa' brgyud gser phreng*. For a further description and analysis of the Tibetan sources, see Chapter Three.

<sup>53</sup> Thinley (1980: 18); for Ray's introduction, see *ibid.* 1–19; for Stott's remark, see *ibid.* 29).

<sup>54</sup> There are a few studies on Buddhist masters, such as Kramer (1999), Ehrhard (2002a and 2002b), Rheingans (2004), and Caumanns (2006) which provide information regarding the religio-historical context.

<sup>55</sup> Thinley (1980: 94): '... and inspired the Karma Gadri movement in art through his work in the field.' See also the dust cover of Brunnhölzl (2004). What Thinley perhaps meant, was the traditional assertion that Nam mkha' bkra shis was an emanation of the Eighth Karmapa (Jackson, D. 1996: 169–176 and 178, n. 360).

<sup>56</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gDams khrid man ngag* (1976 edition).

*Madhyamakāvatāra* of Candrakīrti.<sup>57</sup> This review therefore covers research about the Eighth Karmapa's writings in a broader sense.

In *The Great Perfection*, Samten G. Karmay (1988) uses Tibetan sources authored by the Eighth Karmapa for the first time, drawing on the *rNal 'byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad* published in 1979.<sup>58</sup> With the aid of these texts he briefly presents the Eighth Karmapa's polemics against the rNying ma pa: the Karmapa took issue with the concepts of the pure basis (*ka dag*), the all base (*kun gzhi*), and the all base consciousness (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*, Tib. *kun gzhi rnam shes*).<sup>59</sup> Though Karmay does not attempt to present the Great Seal of the Karmapa, which is not the purpose of his masterful presentation of the rDzogs chen system, his work must be credited for first employing the primary sources of the Eighth Karmapa and presenting his doctrinal critiques of the rNying ma along with the subsequent replies of Sog ldog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624). Though this thesis is not concerned with these debates, Karmay provides important background information.

Paul Williams (1983a, 1983b) and David Seyfort Ruegg (1988) have dealt with the Eighth Karmapa's view on Madhyamaka. In 'A Note on Some Aspects of Mi bskyod rdo rje's Critique of dGe lugs pa Madhyamaka', Williams (1983a) describes the Karmapa's philosophical discussion with Tsong kha pa, founder of the dGe lugs school of Tibetan Buddhism. He presents as the Karmapa's central argument the view that teachings on Madhyamaka, or even the Great Seal, should be an antidote to suffering.<sup>60</sup>

Williams also judges Mi bskyod rdo rje's comments as notable for their impatient style, maintaining that the Karmapa only comments on 'classical' dGe lugs pa texts such as the *Madhyamakāvatāra* in order to refute their 'sophisticated interpretations' on their own grounds.<sup>61</sup> Finally, he suggests further contextualisation of the Karmapa's philosophical views. While

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<sup>57</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.

<sup>58</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGyal dbang karma pa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad*. The four texts from this collection Karmay employed are: *rJe ye bzang rtse ba'i rgyud gsum gsang ba* (ibid. pp. 149–255), *Rang la nges pa'i tshad ma zhes pa'i 'grel ba gnas lugs bdud rtsi' snying khu* (ibid. pp. 337–404), *Yid la mi byed pa'i zur khra* (ibid. pp. 409–417), and *Hva shangs dang 'dres pa'i don 'dzug gtugs su bstan pa* (ibid. pp. 419–436). The last three are significant shorter commentaries on the Great Seal which will also, in part, be used in this dissertation.

<sup>59</sup> Karmay (1988: 180 n. 34, 181–182, 188, 195, 230).

<sup>60</sup> Williams (1983a: 129).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 128.

Williams has contributed to the discussion between the Karmapa and the dGe lugs pa, and makes a few interesting points regarding the Karmapa's character, he has based his assertions on a single source alone: the Madhyamaka commentary, *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.<sup>62</sup> This thesis wishes to remedy this slightly limited portrayal.

Williams (1983b) uses the same commentary for a short paper, where he briefly mentions the Eighth Karmapa's critique of Go bo Rab 'byams pa bSod nams seng ge (1429–1489) with regard to the so-called 'self-awareness' (*rang rig*).<sup>63</sup>

Ruegg (1988) *et passim* explores the same commentary on Madhyamaka by the Eighth Karmapa. He introduces the concept of genealogy or lineage and subsequently translates and paraphrases the introduction (*spyi don*, lit. 'general meaning') of this work and demonstrates that, according to the Karmapa, Maitrīpa is of great importance for bKa' brgyud pa as he was the master of the Great Seal. Ruegg suggests that the Karmapa wrote his commentary in reply to the dGe lugs pa scholar Se ra rJe btsun (1469–1544). And further remarks that the Karmapa 'changed' from the *gzhan stong* ('empty of other') interpretation of Madhyamaka to the *rang stong* ('empty of itself') view over the course of his life, a view that is briefly questioned and enhanced in this research.<sup>64</sup> Ruegg's article can be seen as a valuable starting point for researching the Great Seal of the Eighth Karmapa, as it makes important passages accessible that discuss his distinctions of non-mentation (*amanasikāra*) Madhyamaka, which is quasi-synonymous with Great Seal.<sup>65</sup>

Donald S. Lopez (1996) briefly mentions the polemical answers of Se ra rJe btsun to those who criticise Tsong kha pa's position of Madhyamaka, among them the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>66</sup> Cyrus Stearns (1999) uses the Eighth Karmapa's brief analysis *gZhan stong legs par smra ba'i sgron me* for his account of the *gzhan stong* traditions in Tibet.

In *The Center of the Sunlit Sky*, Karl Brunnhölzl (2004) examines the Madhyamaka interpretation of the bKa' brgyud pa. The work is a thoroughly researched contribution grounded on a range of primary

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<sup>62</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.

<sup>63</sup> Williams (1983b: 243–245).

<sup>64</sup> Ruegg (1988: 1275). On the same page he comments: 'Mi bskyod rdo rje's approach may then well represent his response to the criticism of his earlier work by Chos kyi rgyal mthsan in his *kLu grub dgoñs rgyan*.'

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 1248–1252.

<sup>66</sup> Lopez (1996: 218, 221).

sources. It is not, however, intended as an academic publication and thus exhibits a dearth of historical, cultural, and literary contextualisation. In the course of examining the Madhyamaka of the bKa' brgyud pa, scattered remarks are found regarding the Karmapa's Great Seal interpretation. Brunnhölzl again uses sources authored by the Karmapa, dealing centrally with Madhyamaka.<sup>67</sup> To this end, Brunnhölzl's contribution offers useful information: he summarises the introduction (*spyi don*) of *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, which outlines the Eighth Karmapa's view on the Great Seal in connection with Madhyamaka. With the aid of further sources, he also attempts to reconcile Tibetan disputes on *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* in light of Indian sources, using the Karmapa's comments to underline his claims. Similar to Williams (1983a) and Ruegg (1988), he discusses the differences in the views of the Madhyamaka of Tsong kha pa and that of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>68</sup>

Unlike Williams (1983a) and Ruegg (1988), Brunnhölzl points to internal spiritual reasons as a possible motivation for the philosophical debates: the 'search for truth' and the establishing of the proper view that disallows ethical misconduct. He assumes that when the Karmapa and Tsong kha pa dispute, they do so 'based on great compassion in order to assist others in their own quest for liberation'.<sup>69</sup> He goes on to argue that the masters had their reasons for expressing inexpressible truth in different ways: the capacities and inclinations of their students. Thus, he believes that the refutations and debates of Tibetan scholars 'are not to be seen as personal attacks but as means to sharpen our wisdom'.<sup>70</sup> This stand reflects his and his audience's perspectives as Buddhist practitioners. In general, he considers Madhyamaka not to be a philosophical system, but a means to eliminate suffering and bring about liberation.<sup>71</sup> Some of these ideas will be investigated in the analysis of the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal in Chapter Six. Brunnhölzl's treatment of some specific doctrinal developments in Madhyamaka of the Eighth Karmapa is more or less complete; however, he

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<sup>67</sup> Brunnhölzl, like Ruegg (1988) and Williams (1983a), mainly uses the introduction to *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* when expounding on Madhyamaka in Tibet and in the bKa' brgyud tradition. He also uses the *gZhan stong legs par smra ba'i sgron me* and the Eighth Karmapa's commentary to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa*).

<sup>68</sup> Brunnhölzl (2004: 553–597).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 553.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 554.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 157–160.

neither focuses exclusively on the Great Seal teaching and practice of the Karmapa, nor takes other sources into consideration.

A volume that appeared after this book had been submitted to the publisher is *Mahāmudrā and the Middle Way: Post-Classical Kagyü Discourses on Mind, Emptiness and Buddha-Nature* (2016) by Martina Draszczyk and David Higgins. It discusses four Tibetan scholars' views of the Great Seal, whom the authors term 'post-classical': Karma 'phrin las pa (1456–1539), Śākya mchog ldan (1423–1507), Mi bskyod rdo rje, and Padma dkar po (1527–1592). After an introductory overview, one chapter is devoted to each master; the second volume contains editions and translations of key Tibetan texts.<sup>72</sup> Draszczyk and Higgins had employed this very book about the Eighth Karmapa in its prior thesis version (as 'unpublished thesis', it was available via the British Library, London), using it for presenting the historical context of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>73</sup> They also further worked on and translated texts about the Great Seal that were already discussed in the thesis-version of this book, such as, for example the *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*.<sup>74</sup> At times, no reference is made to the prior-thesis version.<sup>75</sup> On the whole, this most welcome contribution sheds more light on the Middle Way related discourses of key Great Seal masters of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and is very useful for understanding the more doctrinally oriented discussions.

In *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within* (2008), Klaus-Diether Mathes draws upon the Eighth Karmapa's *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentary, demonstrating that his *gzhan stong* resembles that of the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), in his summary of the Buddhist tantras, the *Zab mo nang gi don*.<sup>76</sup> Additional mention of the Eighth Karmapa, limited to a few lines or a footnote, can be found in Kapstein (1989), Martin

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<sup>72</sup> These include the following works by Mi bskyod rdo rje: *rGan po'i rlung sman* (excerpts), *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*, *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* (excerpt), *dGongs gcig 'grel pa VI* (excerpt) (Draszczyk and Higgins 2016, vol. 2: 104–153).

<sup>73</sup> Draszczyk and Higgins 2016: 20–21.

<sup>74</sup> Chapter Three (thesis version 2008: 72 and 72, n. 57) points out textual sources about the Great Seal ascribed to the Eighth Karmapa. The *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis* is paraphrased in Chapter Six (thesis version 2008: 211–213).

<sup>75</sup> There are some points with regard to the usage of my 2004 Master's thesis in their study of Karma 'phrin las pa that I will discuss in my forthcoming book about Karma 'phrin las pa.

<sup>76</sup> Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within: Gö Lotsāwa's Mahāmudrā Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga* (2008). This information was obtained directly from the author, K.D. Mathes (oral communication, August 2006, Hamburg). Mathes (2006: 11) occasionally mentions the Eighth Karmapa.



(1997), Jackson, D. (1994), Schaeffer (1998), Ruegg (2000), Braitstein (2004), and Phuntsho (2005).<sup>77</sup>

A very small number of the Eighth Karmapa's writings have been translated, often in non-scholarly publications. In his *Four Songs to Je Rinpoche*, Glenn Mullin translates the Karmapa's praise of the dGe lugs pa founder Tsong kha pa.<sup>78</sup>

Two translations by the Nālandā Translation Committee discuss the Eighth Karmapa. In 1980, a collection of Tibetan poetry (*mgur*) was published in translation with the title *The Rain of Wisdom*. It contains the translation of a collection entitled *Ocean of bKa' brgyud Songs (bKa' brgyud mgur mtsho)* originally assembled by the Eighth Karmapa and later expanded by other Tibetan meditators. The collection contains the quintessential poetical instructions of thirty-five bKa' brgyud poets, some authored by the Eighth Karmapa. Besides the limited scope of texts by the Eighth Karmapa, Kapstein has already pointed out infelicities in the translation together with a lack of contextualisation of the genre of Tibetan poetry.<sup>79</sup>

The Nālandā Translation Committee published 'Daily Prayers' in the collection *Religions of Tibet in Practice* (1997) as part of the Princeton Readings in Religion Series. The text contains a short translation of an invocation entitled 'Fulfilling the Aspirations of Gyalwang Karmapa'. In this invocation, two short passages are ascribed to Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje.<sup>80</sup> However, neither the author nor the origin of the translation can be verified, since no Tibetan source is mentioned.

The Nitārtha Institute has translated the sixth chapter of the *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.<sup>81</sup> This work can serve as a valuable aid in understanding this particular Madhyamaka text but neglects historical and

<sup>77</sup> Kapstein (1989: 230), Martin (1992: 185), Jackson, D. (1994: 73–83), Schaeffer (1998: 857), Ruegg (2000: 6, 26, 62), Braitstein (2004: 10), and Phuntsho (2005: 44, 114, 120, 238–239, 243, 245, 247, 257).

<sup>78</sup> Mullin (1978: 37–40). The text is found as one among five praises to various masters in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa: Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, Gangs can phyis byon pa'i mkhas pa chen po bstan bcos rgyas par mdzad pa'i dam pa lnga la bstod pa*.

<sup>79</sup> Kapstein (1983: 79).

<sup>80</sup> Nālandā (1997: 408–409). Verses one and three seem to resemble those from the famed *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal 'byor (Guru Yoga in Four Sessions)* (see Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal 'byor*, p. 275/fol. 3a). The dedication could be the translation of an often used formula from the preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) dBang phyug rdo rje Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i phreng ba*, p. 119).

<sup>81</sup> Mikyö Dorje (2006) was translated by Jules Levinson and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso.

religious contexts. It does, for example, not mention the birth date of the Karmapa. While collaboration with a learned Tibetan scholar was sought in this work, it has value as a translated text.<sup>82</sup> In a collection of selected practice instructions titled *Straight from the Heart*, Karl Brunnhölzl (2007) includes a translation of the Eighth Karmapa's comment on a song of Milarepa.<sup>83</sup>

Finally, a brief note on the research about the Great Seal as such.<sup>84</sup> While some translations and transcribed teachings are available, academic work is scarce, this includes both scholarly apparatus and historically grounded attempts to come to terms with the textual and terminological complexities on the bKa' brgyud Great Seal.<sup>85</sup> Though valuable research has been and is carried out on the late Indian and early Tibetan Great Seal, the textual material of teachers such as Marpa, Zhang, and Phag mo gru pa demands more attention, not to mention the manifold proponents of the various later schools such as the 'Bri gung and Karma bKa' brgyud.<sup>86</sup> With

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<sup>82</sup> This review does not wish to denigrate the value of such works *per se*; accurate translation is an arduous task and welcome contribution. But the lack of a critical apparatus and proper contextualisation impedes scholarly use of such isolated texts in translation (see also Sobisch 2002a: 5–8).

<sup>83</sup> Brunnhölzl (2007) has translated Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun mi las rje sgam po pa gdams pa mgur 'grel*. For such translations, see previous note.

<sup>84</sup> The literature on the Great Seal as such is not reviewed extensively. The relevant literature is treated in Chapter Two and Chapter Six.

<sup>85</sup> Jackson, R. (2001: 2). Guenther has pioneered in academic studies of the Great Seal through his research on Nāropa and Saraha (1969, 1986, 1993). While Ruegg (1989) has concentrated more broadly on sudden and gradual approaches to enlightenment and the Great Seal, Broido (1984, 1985, 1987) has focused his research on the sixteenth-century contemporary of the Eighth Karmapa, 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (1527–1592). Tiso and Torricelli (1991) have critically studied the *Mahāmudropadeśa* ascribed to Tilopa. For the Karma bKa' brgyud Great Seal, see the very good translations of Tashi Namgyal's manuals (Namgyal 1986 translated by Lhalungpa, and Namgyal 2001 translated by Pema Kunsang) and translations of the extensive guidebooks by Karmapa IX dBang phyug rdo rje (1989, 1992 and 2001). See also the few shorter works on the Great Seal masters such as Evans-Wentz (1958), Gyaltsen (1983), Kongtrul (1992), bsTan pa'i nyin byed (1994), the manuals of the famed Karma Chagme (1997), and Rangdröl (1989).

<sup>86</sup> In recent works, Schaeffer (2000) and Braitstein (2004) have focused on the Great Seal of the Indian *siddha* Saraha. In *Tantric Treasures*, Roger Jackson (2004) has translated and annotated important Apabhramśa-language spiritual songs (*dohā*) of Saraha, Kāṇha, and Tilopa. Mathes (2006, 2007, 2011) has begun breaking new ground in exploring Indian sources (texts in Sanskrit and Tibetan translation) of the non-tantric Great Seal. He also (2005, 2008) focused on the reception of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrines and Great Seal theories and apologetics by the famous historian 'Gos Lo tsā ba (1392–1481). Sherpa (2004) has focused on both life and doctrine of sGam po pa. Kragh (1998: 128) focused on sGam po pa and is conducting research heavily based on the writings attributed to him (*Dwags po'i bka'*

regard to the period of the Eighth Karmapa, Kapstein has briefly noted that a certain systematisation of bKa' brgyud Great Seal manuals can be observed in the late sixteenth century.<sup>87</sup>

As many concepts and doctrinal developments have not yet been fully grasped, the research has concentrated on the task of analysing its concepts and doctrinal developments.<sup>88</sup> Yet, already David Jackson has noted: 'The Great Seal and similar teachings by their nature do not lend themselves easily to discursive description and historical analyses.'<sup>89</sup> And Mathes has briefly mentioned that also much earlier Great Seal material was based on question and answer texts. Though sources of this textual genre have served as a basis for various academic studies, an examination of why so many significant sources are question and answer texts constitutes somewhat of a lacuna.<sup>90</sup>

On the whole, secondary literature, both on the life and the Great Seal instructions of the Eighth Karmapa, is limited. The lack of historical studies of his life necessitates covering this area from the ground up. His ideas on Madhyamaka and his relationship to Tsong kha pa have been partially explored. In the course of this some Great Seal theory was presented.<sup>91</sup> Whilst Karmay (1988) has identified a few valuable sources, no currently extant

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'bum). Schiller, on the basis of his excellent Master's thesis has researched the system of the 'four yogas' (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) of the Great Seal. *Die "Vier Yoga"-Stufen der Mahāmudrā-Meditationstradition* (Dept. of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> See Kapstein (2006a: 58–60), for the systematisation of the siddha's teachings in Tibet. See Sobisch (2003a), for the meditation manuals (*khrid yig*) of the five-fold Great Seal of the 'Bri gung pa. Sobisch (ibid. 2, n. 4) briefly mentions the Eighth Karmapa's *lNga ldan tsogs su bsgom pa'i cho ga*, pointing to the Eighth Karmapa's contribution to 'Bri gung pa doctrine.

<sup>88</sup> Jackson, D. (1994) attempts to clarify the understanding of Sa skya Paṇḍita's critique (ibid. 2–8) with a rich range of sources and is mainly concerned with the Great Seal debates. He has hinted at possible developments of the Great Seal in the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition: namely, that the figure of Maitrīpa and his Great Seal were particularly emphasised from the sixteenth century onwards and that the Eighth Karmapa contributed to this development (ibid. 82–84). These useful remarks are briefly taken up in Chapter Six (6.4). Also Kragh (1998: 41–62) is very much concerned with doctrinal issues. His work contains a portrayal of sGam po pa's Great Seal (ibid. 29–41) which aids the context of this thesis.

<sup>89</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 7).

<sup>90</sup> Mathes (2011: 96) has mentioned in passing that each of the twenty-five *amanasikāra* works was Maitrīpa's reply to a different question. Questions and answers figure prominently among the early sources on the Great Seal of sGam po pa, such as the famed *Phag mo gru pa'i zhus lan* (*Answers to Questions by Phag mo gru pa*) (see Kragh 1998: 18–20; Jackson, D. 1994: 14–28; Martin 1984: 245; Sherpa 2004: 97–125).

<sup>91</sup> Especially Ruegg (1988) and Brunnhölzl (2004).

body of research explicitly explores the various Great Seal instructions of the Eighth Karmapa or his question and answer texts in detail. This research takes into account a new range of sources (the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* together with some additional rare texts), clarifies basic facts about the Eighth Karmapa's life, and emphasises selected Great Seal teachings across textual genres which condense and convey religious meaning.

#### *1.4 Plan of this Book*

Chapter One presented the main argument and related research questions. It explained the methodologies applied and discusses the relevance of previous research. Chapter Two introduces the doctrinal and historical contexts through the Great Seal distinctions of Kong sprul (1813–1899), and explains key points of the bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal and sGam po pa. It outlines the Great Seal critique of Sa skya Paṇḍita, which became the subject of many medieval bKa' brgyud pa apologetics and explains the tense religio-political conditions the Eighth Karmapa was confronted with.

Chapter Three critically evaluates the main textual sources and genres employed. Through discussing the history and transmission of the Karmapa's writings and the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, it lays a solid foundation for academic research. It briefly surveys the main sources for the Great Seal analysis: question and answer texts (*dris lan*), meditation instructions (*khrid*), esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), and advices (*bslab bya*). It also discusses the earliest spiritual biographies and spiritual memoirs most suitable for an analysis of the Eighth Karmapa's life.

Chapter Four examines how the Eighth Karmapa became one of the most prominent scholars and mystical teachers of his tradition. It explores how a rival candidate for the title of Karmapa, and the problematic religio-political situation resulting, may have reinforced his intellectual development. It examines his education in both scholastic and mystic teachings, and portrays his involvement and scepticism of contemporary worldly activities. Finally, it outlines his Great Seal instructions within his overall programme of meditation teaching that stressed Atiśa's graded path.

Chapter Five investigates concrete teaching situations through three case studies: dialogues embedded in the spiritual biography by A khu a khra, the *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan* (*Answer to a Question Asked by Gling drung pa La 'dor ba*) and the *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin* (*Identification of the Blessing of the Great Seal*). It illustrates key points and

divergent expressions of the Great Seal and how these were taught, depending on different circumstances and contexts.

Chapter Six further examines the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal instructions in a broader context; taking into account passages from additional meditation instructions and question and answer texts. It isolates the doctrine of understanding conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* as the key element, but concludes that a definitive Great Seal categorisation of the Eighth Karmapa is difficult to locate in the examined material. The chapter establishes the guru as the common origin, means, and unifying spiritual element of Great Seal practices of any approach, suggesting that an essential instruction is, according to circumstance, taught via either tantric or non-tantric means.

Chapter Seven concludes by advocating Great Seal instructions as pedagogical devices in which categorisation is subordinated to experience and realisation. It suggests that studies of Buddhism, especially Buddhist mysticism, can only benefit from careful awareness of contexts, such as genre and history. It indicates specific textual sources and meaningful areas for potential future research.

## Chapter 2

### The Great Seal and 15th to 16th Century Tibet

#### 2.1 *The Great Seal*

The Marpa bKa' brgyud and later Dwags po bKa' brgyud (the lineages which passed through sGam po pa) are meditative traditions whose essential practices comprise the Great Seal and the six doctrines of Nāropa.<sup>1</sup> In the course of this thesis the term 'Great Seal', if not otherwise specified, refers to this central instruction of the bKa' brgyud pa schools, which has been interpreted in different ways.<sup>2</sup>

The word 'bKa' brgyud' means: 'transmitted precept' or 'succession of precepts' and relates principally to any teaching passed on from teacher to student.<sup>3</sup> In Tibet, there exist two transmissions that came to be known by the name 'bKa' brgyud': the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud and the Marpa bKa' brgyud which were passed through Marpa Lo tsā ba (c.1000–c.1081).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mathes (2007: 1).

<sup>2</sup> A word definition by Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) reads: 'Because when experientially cultivating that to which one has been introduced through the esoteric directions of the guru, neither knowledge nor knowables surpass its radiance, it is a "seal" and because, besides that, there is no other gnosis of the Buddha to be sought out, it is "great"' (trans. Kapstein 2006a: 54, n. 20).

<sup>3</sup> There is further the name variation, *dkar brgyud*, where the word 'white' (*dkar*) refers to the white meditation garment worn by meditators (Smith 2001: 40; see also Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, *Thu'u bkwan grub mtha'*, p. 122). The naming of the bKa' brgyud tradition is discussed in Schiller (2002: 15-18) as well as in Smith (2001: 39-51). For the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud see Kapstein (1980) and Smith (2001: 53-58). Kapstein (2007: 116) uses the translation 'succession of precepts' for bKa' brgyud pa.

<sup>4</sup> See the following section on the details of this distinction. There are various opinions concerning Marpa's years of living (Stearns 2001: 171, n. 5). For biographies in European languages, see Bacot (1937) and Tsang Nyön Heruka (=gTsang smyon He ru ka) (1995); for a critical review of the 1995 translation, see Martin (1984). Sernesi (2004: 3–12) has argued on the basis of Mi la ras pa's 'Six Secret Songs' that some essential instructions were not

Marpa is said to have received two main transmissions of Great Seal practice: the Great Seal in combination with yogic exercise, from Nāropa, and the Great Seal of Maitrīpa, later considered to be one source of sGam po pa's interpretations.<sup>5</sup> The connection to the teacher is particularly significant in the meditative traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, and all masters equally emphasise the importance of a teacher for attaining realisation.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1.1 The bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal: A Brief Overview

Great Seal interpretations and categorisations differ even among the bKa' brgyud pa schools and its categorisation became a point of continued debate.<sup>7</sup> A brief presentation of a later bKa' brgyud master, Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899), may aid an initial survey: he distinguished a generally accepted mantra Great Seal, a sūtra Great Seal, and an essence Great Seal.<sup>8</sup>

Mantra Great Seal involves receiving tantric empowerment from one's guru (the Great Seal being often equated with the fourth empowerment of the \**niruttara-tantras*) and subsequent training in the two stages of meditation.<sup>9</sup> During the 'completion stage' (*rdzogs rim*), the Great Seal is practised in connection with the six doctrines of Nāropa as 'the way of means' (Skt. *upāyamārga*, Tib. *thabs lam*). Through exploitation of yogic energies and the experience of 'great bliss' (Skt. *mahāsukha*, Tib. *bde ba chen po*) the meditator experiences the 'innate ultimate wisdom of bliss and emptiness' (*bde stong lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*), recognising the luminous nature of mind (*sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba*). In the tantras a set of four

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passed via sGam po pa but Mi la ras pa's student Ras chung rDo rje grags (1083–1161). For the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud, see Kapstein (1980).

<sup>5</sup> Which teachings Tilopa received and from which masters is presented varyingly in Tibetan sources. The topic is analysed and well summarised in the article by Torricelli (1993) and in Marpa Chos kyi blo gros (1995: 66, n. 18). See Torricelli (1993: 197f.). For the Tibetan text see Marpa Chos kyi blo gros (1995: 7); for the translation, see *ibid.* 34–35.

<sup>6</sup> Powers (1997: 271). For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter Six (6.5).

<sup>7</sup> The most essential works in the Tibetan language are contained in the *Phyag chen mdzod*, as well as in Kong sprul's *rGya chen bka' mdzod* and *gDams ngag mdzod*, vols. 5–7. The history of the Great Seal is recounted in the famed *Deb ther sngon po* (*Blue Annals*) translated by Roerich (1996: 839–867).

<sup>8</sup> Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya mdzod*, vol. 3, p. 357; see also Mathes (2007: 545).

<sup>9</sup> The fourth empowerment, though accepted by the Tibetan tradition, seems to have a fairly thin standing in Indian sources. Isaacson (2000: 41f.) assumes at the present state of research, that the existence of the fourth empowerment originates from a single cryptic *pāda* of the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* or *Samājottara: caturthaṃ tat punas tathā*.

*mudrā* is mentioned in varying order, often associated with the four empowerments. In some systems, the *karmamudrā* (the actual or imagined consort) brings forth the ‘exemplary wisdom’ (*dpe’i ye shes*) of the third empowerment, which in turn leads to the ‘final ultimate awareness’ (*don gyi ye shes*) of the fourth empowerment: this is the *mahāmudrā*.<sup>10</sup>

Sūtra Great Seal is defined by its connection to the *pāramitāyāna*, being in accord with tantra, and focusing on the pith instruction of not becoming mentally engaged (*amanasikāra*) on the basis of sūtra teachings and practices (such as *śamathā* and *vipaśyanā* meditations). This definition is often quoted by Tibetan teachers and stems from the *Tattvadaśakaṭikā*.<sup>11</sup> While sGam po pa is credited with having taught a form of the Great Seal based on the sūtras, the term ‘sūtra Great Seal’ (*mdo lugs phyag chen*) first surfaced in Tibet during the nineteenth century. According to sGam po pa, it was the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (sometimes called the *Uttaratantraśāstra*) which was deemed vitally important by the bKa’ brgyud pa exegetes for understanding Great Seal theory and practice.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A frequently taught order would be: *dharmamudrā*, *amayamudrā* *karmamudrā*, and *mahāmudrā* (Namgyal 1986: 101; for the term ‘Great Seal’, see *ibid.* 92–105 and bKra shis rnam rgyal, *Phyag rgya chen po’i khrid yig chen mo*, pp. 163–168). There are numerous interpretations and systematisations of this complex tantric topic which cannot be explained here in detail. At times, the Great Seal (*mahāmudrā*) is the third (the fourth being the *amayamudrā*) or the fourth *mudrā* (see also Mathes 2011: 107–113, who investigated Maitrīpa’s *Sekanirdeśa* and *Caturmudropadeśa*; see Gray 2007b: esp. 703–707 and Bentor 2000: 339, for the four empowerments and four *mudrā*). For the phenomenon of tantra in general, see White (2000: 3–38; 2003 and 2005) and Sanderson (1988). For an overview of the Buddhist tantras and Vajrayāna, see Snellgrove (1987), Sanderson (1994), and Isaacson (2000). For the Tibetan organisation of the tantras, see Wedemeyer (2001) and Dalton (2005). For interpretations of the tantras, see Wedemeyer (2007). Davidson (2002) argues for socio-historical interpretations for the rise of tantra in India. Isaacson (2000: 25) explains how vast and multi-faceted a field Indian Buddhist tantra is, and warns against premature conclusions as to its nature.

<sup>11</sup> See Mathes (2006: 225). This refers to Jñānakīrti’s works as summarised by ‘Gos Lo tsā ba in his *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary, *Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos kyi ’grel bshad*. See also gZhon nu dpal, ‘Gos Lo tsā ba, *Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos*, 3 (ed. Mathes 2003).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, p. 400 (Roerich 1996: 459–460). The *Ratnagotravibhāga* is one of the rare Indian commentaries on the *tathāgatagarbhasūtras*. It teaches that the element (*dhātu*) in the state still covered by superficial defilements (*mala*) is called ‘Buddha nature’ or ‘impure suchness’ (*samālā tathatā*), and the state where the defilements are removed is called ‘Buddha’ or ‘pure thusness’ (*nirmalā tathatā*) (Zimmermann 2002: 50–65). Though a relatively small movement in India, it became more popular in Central and East Asian Buddhism (*ibid.* 67–90). For two brief articles on its reception in Tibet, which is linked to the interpretation of *gzhan stong*, see Burchardi (2000 and 2007).



Essence Great Seal constitutes the sudden realisation of one's 'natural mind' (*tha mal gyi shes pa*), which is the perfection inherent (Skt. *sahaja*, Tib. *lhan cig skye pa*) in any experience: after being pointed out (*ngo sprod*) by a qualified teacher, a practitioner of high capacity experiences the essence of mind directly. These teachings are often linked to the *dohā* literature of Saraha and the teaching-cycles attributed to Maitrīpa.<sup>13</sup>

Karma bKra shis chos 'phel, a nineteenth-century-born student of Kong sprul, conducted a similar analysis of the Great Seal in his *dkar chag* to the collection of Indian Great Seal texts.<sup>14</sup> Mathes has shown that bKra shis chos 'phel considers the Great Seal as such (synonymous here with essence Great Seal) a direct and quick path for those of highest capacity, dependent on neither the sūtras nor the tantras. However, it can be combined with the sūtra or tantra methods in order to be suitable for many. These were the two approaches Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas designated 'sūtra Great Seal' and 'mantra Great Seal'.<sup>15</sup>

The progressive stages of meditative development in the Great Seal are portrayed by the bKa' brgyud masters on the basis of the 'four trainings' (*rnal 'byor bzhi*): 'one-pointedness' (*rtse gcig*), 'free from concepts' (*spros bral*), 'one taste' (*ro gcig*), and 'non-meditation' (*sgom med*).<sup>16</sup> The Great Seal is often further distinguished into basis, path, and fruition. Rang byung rdo rje summarises in his *Phyag chen smon lam* (*Great Seal Wishes*) which remain significant until today:

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<sup>13</sup> Mathes (2011: 107). See also the following section 'sGam po pa, Early bKa' brgyud pa and the First Karmapa.'

<sup>14</sup> The collection of Indian works on the Great Seal, *rGya gzhung*, was assembled by the Seventh Karmapa and later edited by the Zhwa dmar Mi pham Chos kyi blo gros (*Phyag chen mdzod*), who added works by later proponents of the Great Seal.

<sup>15</sup> Mathes (2011: 10) used Karma bKra shis chos 'phel's *gNas lugs phyag rgya chen po'i rgya gzhung*.

<sup>16</sup> The extensive clarification of the four stages is attributed to sGam po pa (Namgyal 1986: 357f., 373; Martin 1992: 250–252; Kragh 1998: 19–20). In his manuals, dBang phyug rdo rje elucidates the correspondence between these four stages and the five paths and ten stages (*lam lnga, sa bcu*) of the Mahāyāna (dBang phyug rdo rje 1990: vol. 2; dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX, *Lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi zab khrid*). According to Schiller (2015), this system seems to be a later Tibetan development.

On the basis of purification, the mind itself, its unity of emptiness and clarity; through the means of purification, the Great Seal, the great diamond practice; may the fruit of purification, perfectly pure dharmakāya become manifest, free from the things to be purified, the incidental impurities of delusion!<sup>17</sup>

Karma 'phrin las pa outlines view, meditation, action, and result of the Great Seal:

To observe mind itself is the highest view. Not to be distracted from it is the highest meditation. Effortless action is the highest action. The simultaneous<sup>18</sup> three *buddhakāya* in its basis, when manifest, are the highest result!<sup>19</sup>

### 2.1.2 *sGam po pa, Early bKa' brgyud pa, and the First Karmapa*

The monk sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen (1079–1173), or, more specifically, the writings attributed to him, are crucial for studying any of Tibet's bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal traditions. He is credited with having united the two streams of the more monastic bKa' gdams pa with Marpa and Mi la ras pa's tantric bKa' brgyud pa, transmitted in lay communities.<sup>20</sup>

The research conducted so far allows for the (albeit preliminary) conclusion that sGam po pa distinguished three paths: sūtra, mantra, and Great Seal, also known as the path of inference (*pāramitāyāna*), the path of

<sup>17</sup> Rang byung rdo rje, Karmapa III (1995: 62): *sbyang gzhi sems nyid gsal stong zung 'jug la/ sbyong byed phyag chen rdo rje rnal 'byor ches/ sbyang bya glo bur 'khrul pa'i dri ma mams/ sbyangs 'bras dri bral chos sku mgon gyur shog*. For another translation, see Nydahl (1998: 70).

<sup>18</sup> *Lhun sgrub* is often translated by the term 'spontaneous', which derives from the Latin *spons, spontis* ('free will, own volition') and today connotes 'direct, voluntarily, by its own power'. Zhang Yisun reads: *lhun grub – l. lhun gyis grub pa ste 'bad med rang bzhin gyis grub pa/* = 'without effort, naturally present'. Accordingly, *lhun grub* expresses something which occurs effortlessly and is naturally present. Hence: 'effortless' or 'naturally/always present'. In this verse it supposedly indicates that the Buddha states have always been present.

<sup>19</sup> Karma 'phrin las pa, *Dris lan*, fol. 10a (p. 106): *sems nyid la blta ba lta ba'i mchog/ de la ma yengs pas gom pa'i mchog/ shugs 'byung du spyod pa spyod pa'i mchog/ gzhi thog tu lhun gyi grub pa'i sku gsum po mngon du gyur ba na 'bras bu mchog yin no/*.

<sup>20</sup> Sherpa (2004: 91–93; 158–162). Most writings in sGam po pa's collected works (*bka' 'bum*) (first printed in 1520) stem either from his students or are later compilations (Kragh 2006: 2 ff.). Kragh (1998: 12–26) also provides a good overview of the content, while Sherpa (2004: 79–91) analyses sGam po pa's life and his uniting of the two main transmissions he received and practised. The portrayal here is limited to the key ideas found in the writings of sGam po pa.

blessing (*mantrayāna*), and the path of direct perceptions.<sup>21</sup> The last is termed 'Great Seal' and considered a direct path for those of superior faculties. The novelty perceived in sGam po pa's teaching (whether rightly so or not) was twofold: firstly, the path of direct perception (sometimes also called 'path of blessing' although this term is normally considered to be tantra) was considered self-sufficient; secondly, students were introduced to the Great Seal without receiving prior tantric empowerment.<sup>22</sup>

According to 'Gos Lo tsā ba, Marpa and Mi la ras pa produced first 'inner heat/power' (Skt. *caṇḍālī*, Tib. *gtum mo*; one of Nāropa's six doctrines) and then realisation of the Great Seal in their students. But sGam po pa produced this realisation even in beginners who had not received empowerment: 'Gos Lo tsā ba called this 'general *pāramitāyāna* teachings'. sGam po pa also said that his Great Seal would have been taught indirectly in the *Samādhirājasūtra*, to the extent that by realising the Great Seal one would understand the hidden meaning of the sūtras. Additionally, sGam po pa accepted Great Seal practice in its 'classical' sense as a term for the ultimate awareness arising from the third empowerment in the context of the mantra path.<sup>23</sup> Most texts of the collected writings attributed to sGam po pa emphasise bKa' gdams and Great Seal instructions; mantra is taught occasionally.<sup>24</sup>

Sherpa suggests that the term 'Great Seal' may have been used here in two different senses: the realisation of the essence, superior to both sūtric and tantric paths, would be the older sense of the term. In its second sense—and here is discerned a similarity to the analysis of bKra shis chos 'phel above—it is a practical and pedagogical system that, on the basis of conventional Mahāyāna practices and analysis, culminates in the Great Seal. The name 'Great Seal' would thus refer to the sūtric path for the pedagogical reason that it eventually leads to experience of the 'real' Great

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<sup>21</sup> For the three paths system of sGam po pa, see Sherpa (2004: 130) and Jackson, D. (1994: 25–28). The three paths are, for example, depicted in sGam po pa bSod nam rin chen, *Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs*, pp. 527f. While the last path of the Great Seal is described as the one of direct perceptions (*mngon sum*), Sherpa (2004: 130), based on research on a range of texts, labels it 'path of blessing'. See also the Eighth Karmapa's Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII *Kam tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 6b (p. 968).

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 72).

<sup>23</sup> This is according to the later historian 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, p. 402 (Roerich 1996: 461–462). See also Jackson, D. (1994: 12).

<sup>24</sup> Sherpa (2004: 33) suggests that mantric instructions were taught under a veil of secrecy.

Seal.<sup>25</sup> This said, it remains difficult at present to ascertain sGam po pa's definitive position regarding a non-tantric Great Seal. The 'Bri gung pa exegete 'Jig rten mgon po, for example, offers a system 'where, in short, mahāmudrā is achieved outside of the "path of means" (*thabs lam*), but clearly within the tantric "path of liberation" (*grol lam*).<sup>26</sup>

In a reply to the First Karmapa (*Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan*), sGam po pa emphasised that 'his tradition' as a third path would make direct perception into the path. He also distinguished two kinds of individuals: those of 'gradual' (*rim gyis pa*) and those of 'simultaneist' (*cig car ba*) approaches to enlightenment. Direct access is restricted to the few persons of 'good capacities' (*skal ldan*) from former lifetimes; however, sGam po pa called himself *rim gyis pa* upon occasion.<sup>27</sup>

His advices for Great Seal-practice were sometimes termed 'profound instructions of the Great Seal, the union with the innate' (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor zab khrid*).<sup>28</sup> sGam po pa wrote about the innate (Skt. *sahaja*), a term associated with the Indian *dohā* literature: 'The innate nature of mind is the *dharmakāya*, and the innate experience is the light of the *dharmakāya*.<sup>29</sup> Karma 'phrin las pa comments:

<sup>25</sup> Sherpa (2004: 129–133). A similar analysis was provided in personal communication with Zhwa dmar Mi pham Chos kyi blo gros (Renchen-Ulm, August 2006). In his recent *Buddhistische Sichtweisen und die Praxis der Meditation* [*Buddhist Theories and the Practice of Meditation*], the late Zhwa dmar rin po che (Shamar Rinpoche 2007: 105–108) follows the threefold distinction by Kong sprul and bKra shis chos 'phel, considering essence Great Seal as an immediate transmission not necessarily linked to any of the other approaches (ibid. 107). But he distinguishes two approaches to sūtric Great Seal: one type would be based on *samatha*-practice and ensuing analysis of the mind, the teacher deciding when to point out the mind's true nature. The second approach, exclusively taught by sGam po pa, would be a direct way to combine sūtra and Great Seal and grounded upon the *Samadhirājasūtra* (ibid. 106).

<sup>26</sup> Sobisch (2011: 220).

<sup>27</sup> See sGam po pa bSod nam rin chen, *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan*; see also Jackson, D. (1992: 102 and 1994: 25 f.). For the sudden and gradual approaches in Central and East Asian Buddhism, see Stein (1987), Gomez (1987), Gimello and Gregory (1983), and Ueyama (1983). For studies of the early Dun huang material see, for example, Meinert (2002, 2003 and 2007) and Van Schaik (2004).

<sup>28</sup> For the purpose of this work, the Sanskrit term *sahaja* (Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa*) is rendered with the help of the expression 'innate', and *lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes* as 'innate (absolute) wisdom'. At times the phrases 'simultaneously arisen' or 'co-emergent' appear to be more suitable. It seems that any attempt to translate them should never be considered out of the given context. See also Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, *Grub mtha'*, p. 115, and Kragh (1998: 32–36).

<sup>29</sup> sGam po pa bSod nam rin chen, *Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs*, p. 545: *sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos sku dang/ snang ba lhan skyes chos sku'i 'od yin zhes*.

'The inherent nature of mind is the *dharmakāya*' denotes that very nature of the unborn mind. 'The inherent experience is the light of the *dharmakāya*' refers to the boundless radiance of mind. Both the mind and its light are not incompatible—they are of the same nature, like the sun and its rays.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the meditator is to understand that which appears (*snang*) and that which is aware of it (*sems nyid*) (in other words mind (*sems*), conceptualisation (*rnam rtog*), and *dharmakāya*) have always arisen simultaneously. The goal of this understanding is direct experience of the highest truth (Skt. *paramārtha-satya*), free from fabrications (Skt. *niṣprapañca*). In order to make it accessible to, or unite it with (*sbyor*), one's mind, one applies instructions (*gdams pa*).<sup>31</sup> The meditative training of the Great Seal consists in training to let the mind rest 'uncontrived' or 'without artifice' (*ma bcos*). This path is intrinsically linked with a qualified teacher, who 'points out the [nature of] mind' (*sems kyi ngo sprod*) and to whom devotion is required. A further key term is 'single efficacious white [remedy]' (*dkar po gcig thub*), attributed to Lama Zhang.<sup>32</sup>

Following sGam po pa's time, there appeared the so-called four greater and eight minor bKa' brgyud schools, also named 'Dwags po bKa' brgyud' after sGam po pa's native land.<sup>33</sup> Of the bKa' brgyud traditions, the Karma bKa' brgyud has its own illustrious history. The First Karmapa and founder of the lineage, Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193), was a main student of sGam po pa.<sup>34</sup> Tradition claims that at the moment of the First Karmapa's

<sup>30</sup> Karma 'phrin las pa, *mGur*, p. 33: *sems nyid lhan skyes chos kyi sku zhes pa/ /skye med sems kyi gshis lugs de nyid yin/ /snang ba lhan skyes chos sku 'od de ni/ /'gag med sems kyi gdangs la gsung bar gda' / /sems dang de yi 'od gnyis mi 'gal te/ /nyi dang zer ba bzhin rang bzhin gcig pa'ol*.

<sup>31</sup> A definition by Phag mo gru pa, according to Schiller (2002: 144, n. 452): *Sems dang rnam rtog chos sku gsum/ dang po (sic!) lhan cig skyes pa de/ /gdams pas sems su sbyor ba'i phyir/ /lhan cig skyes sbyor zhes su bshad/*. Also see Namgyal (1986: 224) and Jackson (1994: 11, n. 19).

<sup>32</sup> For a further depiction of the meditative path and the mentioning of the importance of devotion to the teacher with the aid of the works in the *Dwags po bKa' 'bum*, see Kragh (1998: 32–39). For the term *dkar po gcig thub* in sGam po pa's answers and Zhang's *Phyag chen zab lam mthar thug*, see Jackson, D. (1994: 150–158).

<sup>33</sup> Among sGam po pa's students were: Phag mo gru rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170), 'Bri gung 'Jigs rten gsum dgon (1143–1217), and the unconventional Lama Zhang brTson grus seng ge (1123–1193), a disciple of sGam po pa's nephew. Writings of these influential masters constitute significant sources for examination of the early Great Seal. 'Greater' and 'minor' are not hierarchical terms, but indicate relative closeness to sGam po pa or to his nephew, Dwags po sGom tshul (1116–1169). For an overview of the bKa' brgyud branches, see Smith (2001: 47–49).

<sup>34</sup> According to Kong sprul's *gDams ngag mdzod* (translated in Kapstein 2007: 118), Karma Pakṣi taught the Great Seal in such instructions as the 'four-pointed wheel of reality' (*gnad*

awakening he was presented with a vajra crown, or black crown, which had been woven by the female Buddhas or *dākinī* from their hair. Hence he was called ‘Zhwa nag Karmapa’ meaning ‘Black Hat Karmapa’. The Karmapa is credited with being the first reincarnate lama of Tibet.<sup>35</sup>

The writings of the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), created a milestone in the tradition and remain significant until today.<sup>36</sup> One of his disciples, rTogs ldan grags pa seng ge, was later called the First Zhwa dmar pa (1283–1348), or ‘Red Hat’ lama.<sup>37</sup> A tradition of the Karma bKa’ brgyud asserts that the Karmapa and Zhwa dmar pa are of one mind (*thugs rgyud gcig par*), and as a result are sometimes called ‘Black Hat Karmapa’ and ‘Red Hat Karmapa’.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.1.3 *Sa skya Paṇḍita, Indian Great Seal, and Later Systematisations*

As was pointed out, in the thirteenth century aspects of the Great Seal of the bKa’ brgyud pa became highly contested. And, though Great Seal teachers

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*bzhi chos nyid kyi 'khor lo*), and the ‘pointing out the three bodies’ (*sku gsum ngo sprod*); the latter is contained in the Second Karmapa Karma Pakṣi’s *sku gsum ngo sprod*.

<sup>35</sup> The First Karmapa founded the monastery of Karma dgon in Eastern Tibet in 1147, and in 1193 founded mTshur phu, the main monastic seat of the Karma bKa’ brgyud in Central Tibet (Richardson 1980: 337; Wylie 1978: 38). For the concept of the reincarnate lama, see Goldstein (1973: 446–448) and Wylie (1978). While Richardson (*ibid.*) assumes that the name ‘Karmapa’ stems from the founding of the Karma monastery, tradition asserts that it is a slightly Tibetanised Sanskrit *karma* (‘action’) combined with the Tibetan nominaliser *pa*, making: ‘the person [doing] the [buddha] activity’ (Karma ‘phrin las pa, *Dris lan*, p. 162: *rgya skad karma zhes pa bod skad du las shes bya bar bsgyur dgos pas / sangs rgyas thams cad kyi phrin las pa yin pa’i don gyis na karma pa zhes grags pa’o*). For an elaborate presentation of the history of the bKa’ brgyud tradition and the Karmapas, the most significant Tibetan sources are *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston*; *Kaṃ tshang*, and, as far as the Karmapas are concerned, Nges don bstan rgyas, *Karma pa sku ‘phreng gyi rnam thar*. In English, see Roerich (1996: 473ff.), Smith (2001: 39–87), Thinley (1980), and Thaye (1990).

<sup>36</sup> A translation of the three significant texts (apart from the *Zab mo nang gi don*) into German can be found in Rang byung rdo rje, Karmapa III; trans. Draszczyk (1995: 42–67).

<sup>37</sup> See Roerich (1996: 523–532) for the First Zhwa dmar pa’s life. Also see Karma ‘phrin las pa’s short account in *Dris lan rnam par thar pa’i don bsdus bzhuḡs so* in Karma ‘phrin las pa, *Dris lan*, fol. 41a–43a (p. 168ff.).

<sup>38</sup> See for example Karma ‘phrin las pa, *Dris lan*, fol. 43b (p. 172), wherein he explains that the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakṣi (1206–1283), was reborn as both Karmapa and Zhwa dmar pa.

like Lama Zhang had already been criticised,<sup>39</sup> Sa skya Paṇḍita's (1182–1251) critique had a lasting impact.<sup>40</sup>

David Jackson summarises Sa skya Paṇḍita's critique as follows: Sa skya Paṇḍita did not agree that (i) a single method or factor (even insight into emptiness presented as Great Seal doctrine) could suffice soteriologically, that (ii) the wisdom of the Great Seal could arise through an exclusively non-conceptual method, and (iii) that the Great Seal could ever be taught outside the Mantrayāna. As a consequence, it would follow that: (i) sGam po pa's Great Seal is to meditate on a mere idea of what Sa skya Paṇḍita considers the Great Seal, (ii) it is similar to Madhyamaka meditation (which takes a much longer time), (iii) or it is the Chinese Ch'an tradition of Hwa shang Mahāyāna in disguise (considered inauthentic following the debate of bSam yas), and does not accord with the Indian tradition (where the Great Seal is only taught in a tantric context).<sup>41</sup>

Whether Sa skya Paṇḍita's assessment was motivated by a need for accuracy or by religio-political issues, the bKa' brgyud traditions, aside from dismissing it as jealousy, sought to build historical and logical arguments defending sGam po pa's teaching.<sup>42</sup> Amongst the defenders, 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392–1481) indicated the Indian origins in the works of Jñānakīrti (tenth/eleventh century) and Maitrīpa (c.1007–c.1085) together with the latter's disciple, Sahajavajra.<sup>43</sup>

In his twenty-five *amanasikāra* works, Maitrīpa explains non-abiding (Tib. *rab tu mi gnas pa*, Skt. *apratiṣṭhāna*), and the meditation of 'not becoming mentally engaged' (Tib. *yiḍ la mi byed pa*, Skt. *amanasikāra*).<sup>44</sup> Other key texts are those of the Indian Great Seal siddhas: Saraha and Kāṇha's *Dohākoṣa*, Tilopa's *Mahāmudropadeśa*, and writings in the late

<sup>39</sup> See Jackson, D. (1994: 55–58). Polemics and debates have always been a part of Tibetan Buddhism (Smith 2001: 236–240).

<sup>40</sup> This was mainly expressed in Sa skya Paṇḍita's *sDom gsum rab dbye* and the *Thub pa'i dongs gsal*; for his strategy and the textual occurrences and further texts, see Jackson, D. (1994: 85–90, 161–189).

<sup>41</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 72); see also Kragh (1998: 52) and Van der Kuijp (1986). Kragh (1998: 61) has, on the basis of historical evidence from the *Deb ther sngon po*, suggested the plausible solution that Sa skya Paṇḍita's source for Great Seal teachings were those transmissions which he received via 'Brog mi Lo tsā ba. They would stem from a period in India ('Brog mi visited India between 1008–1021) where Maitrīpa's sūtra-tantra blend had not yet been disseminated (Maitrīpa's dates being possibly 1001–1087; see Tatz 1987).

<sup>42</sup> Jackson, D. (1992: 108).

<sup>43</sup> For 'Gos Lo tsā ba, his doctrines and defence of the Great Seal, see Mathes (2008).

<sup>44</sup> Mathes (2006: 205–206).

middle-Indian Aṣṭaśāstrī language.<sup>45</sup> Mathes, who does not wish to rule out Chinese influences, has concluded:

It can be shown that the practice described in the Indian *mahāmudrā* works does not need to be Tantric. In Saraha's *dohās* it is simply the realization of mind's co-emergent nature. Maitrīpa uses the term *mahāmudrā* for precisely such an approach, thus employing an originally Tantric term for something that is not a specifically Tantric practice. It is thus legitimate for Karma Bkra shis chos 'phel to speak of Saraha's *mahāmudrā* tradition as being originally independent of the sūtras and the tantras. For Maitrīpa, the direct realization of emptiness (or the co-emergent) is the bridging link between the sūtras and the tantras, and it is thanks to this bridge that *mahāmudrā* can be linked to the sūtras and the tantras. In the sūtras it takes the form of the practice of non-abiding and not becoming mentally engaged, while in the tantras it occupies a special position among the four *mudrās*.<sup>46</sup>

The interpretations of the bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal teachings following the thirteenth century can be regarded as a story of reception, commentary, apologetic, and systematisation of the practices and writings of early Tibetan masters like sGam po pa, and Indian proponents like Saraha and Maitrīpa. It has been noted that masters such as 'Gos Lo tsā ba and the Eighth Karmapa may have contributed to a shift of emphasis towards Maitrīpa as originator of the key Great Seal teaching; an assertion stemming from the earlier master rGod tshang pa (1189–1258?).<sup>47</sup>

Of fifteenth-century masters, the Seventh Karmapa, Chos grags rgya mtsho, deserves mention for his role in compiling the Indian Great Seal works. The Eighth Karmapa's teacher, Karma 'phrin las pa, composed the most significant direct commentaries on Saraha's three *dohā* of sixteenth-century Tibet (*Do hā skor gsum gyi ṭīka*). Other Great Seal masters, such as the Eighth Karmapa's contemporaries Padma dkar po and bKra shis nam

<sup>45</sup> For the conundrum of Saraha in India, see Braitstein (2004: 16–39); for his Great Seal and songs, see (ibid. 68–82), Jackson, R. (2004: 53–117) and Guenther (1993); for his reception in Tibet, see Guenther (1969) and Schaeffer (2000). For further material on the *dohā* of Kāṇha and Tilopa, see also Jackson, R. (2004: 117–143) and Kværne (1977). For the *Mahāmudropadeśa*, see Tiso and Torricelli (1991). For the siddha traditions in India, see White (1996).

<sup>46</sup> Mathes (2011: 121).

<sup>47</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 82–84); he used 'Gos Lo tsā ba's *Deb ther sgnon po*, p. 784 and the Eighth Karmapa's *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* (Rumtek edition 1975), fol. 7b. This is further discussed in Chapter Six (6.4). According to Jackson, D. (ibid. 83), bKra shis nam rgyal, dPa' bo grtsug lag phreng ba, and Śākya mchog ldan follow the idea of the bKa' brgyud specific Great Seal as originating with Maitrīpa, Saraha, and Nāgārjuna.



rgyal, not only fervently defended their traditions but also contributed to more systematic manuals of progressive meditative practices.<sup>48</sup>

## 2.2 *Tibet from the Fifteenth to Sixteenth Centuries: Conflicts between dBus and gTsang*

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were characterised by scholastic systematisation and a solidification of teaching lineages and monastic establishments into religious sects.<sup>49</sup> As religion and politics intertwined throughout Tibet's history<sup>50</sup>, it is a significant possibility that the political situation described below decisively shaped this development.

The era extending from 1354 to 1642 is sometimes described as 'three major hegemonies'<sup>51</sup> or 'successive hegemonies'.<sup>52</sup> Three families successively controlled most areas of dBus and gTsang: the Phag mo gru pa (1354–c.1478), the Rin spungs pa (1478–1565), and the gTsang pa (1565–1642).<sup>53</sup> In the decades preceding the Eighth Karmapa's birth the religio-

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<sup>48</sup> The Seventh Karmapa compiled the Indian Great Seal texts (*rGya gzhung*) (bKra shis chos 'phel, *gNas lugs phyag rgya chen po'i rgya gzhung*, fol. 17a). His own commentaries on the Great Seal remain largely unexplored (see *Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. *nya*, pp. 377–416). For the importance of Karma 'phrin las pa's commentaries, see Schaeffer (2000: 9) and Rheingans (2004: 61–62, 182–186). The Great Seal is outlined and defended in Padma dkar po's *Phyag chen mgan mdzod* (see Broido 1987). While Great Seal meditative techniques are intended to be transmitted orally by a qualified teacher, written meditation manuals became increasingly popular. bKra shis nam rgyal's and the Ninth Karmapa's manuals mostly consist of three steps: (i) preliminary practice (*sngon 'gro khrid yig*), (ii) main practice, and (iii) perfection of practice (dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i phreng ba*; Namgyal 1986: 132–138). Sobisch (2003b: 10–13) assumes these more systematised stepwise guidances emerged due to the increasing number of disciples who engaged in such practices.

<sup>49</sup> Smith (2001: 241).

<sup>50</sup> Ruegg (2004b: 9–11). The concept of a centralised Tibetan state governed by a dGe lugs administration is highly simplistic, only holding true for a limited period (from 1642) in a limited region (Central Tibetan area). Previously, political structures and interrelations were more multi-faceted (Samuel 1993: 39–139; Samuel 2006: 25–46).

<sup>51</sup> Shakabpa (1967: 73).

<sup>52</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 117).

<sup>53</sup> During the preceding Mongol overlordship and Sa skya rule (1244–1354), monasteries had become more powerful than the nobility. Some consider this period crucial for the evolution of a more formal patron–priest relationship (*mchod yon*) and the interplay of religion and politics in Tibet (Ruegg 1991: 448). While the patron often sought to gain control over a certain area or population through presenting offerings to a revered teacher, lamas were in need of funding for and protection of their expanding monastic complexes (Schuh 1976: 219). For the Mongol period as a whole, see Petech (1990), Schuh (1986), Wylie (1977), and the later analysis of Everding (2002).

political situation was characterised by tension and clashes between the Phag mo gru pa of dBus and the gTsang-based Rin spungs pa. Yet, from the 1480s the Karma bKa' brgyud pa under the influence of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524), and the Seventh Karmapa (1454–1507) enjoyed a time of unprecedented honour and support from the Rin spungs pa, reaching its peak in the period between 1498 and 1517, when the Eighth Karmapa was born.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, academic research has not documented this period in detail.<sup>55</sup>

In 1354, after the decline of the Eastern Mongol empire, Tai Si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302–1364; an offspring of the rLang family), from the bKa' brgyud pa seat Phag mo gru, ended the primacy of the Sa skya pas under Mongolian patronage.<sup>56</sup> While the Phag mo gru pa lords were initially affiliated to the bKa' brgyud pa, they were also to become strong supporters of Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) and his disciples.<sup>57</sup> For the Phag mo gru pa, he represented an appealing example of learning and monasticism.<sup>58</sup>

Tsong kha pa had a considerable impact on Tibetan Buddhism, particularly on scholasticism and clerical education.<sup>59</sup> With him, an era began characterised by widespread scholastic activity and intellectual efflorescence: the beginning of high scholasticism.<sup>60</sup> In 1409, with the patronage of the Phag mo gru pa, he initiated the great yearly wishing prayer festival (*smon lam chen mo*) and founded the monastery of Ri bo dGa' ldan. His disciples embarked on the construction of further key dGe lugs monasteries: 'Bras spungs (1416) and Se ra (1419) in the vicinity of Lhasa, as well

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<sup>54</sup> See below, and Jackson, D. (1989a: 29 ff.).

<sup>55</sup> A comprehensive study based on a wide range of Tibetan sources is not yet accomplished (Kapstein 2006b: 116, 130). Accounts can be found in overviews on Tibetan history such as Tucci (1949), Snellgrove and Richardson (1968), Tucci (1980), Stein (1993), Samuel (1993), and Kapstein (2006b). Alternatively, scattered information on related persons or topics is found in various monographies, articles, and theses, such as Jackson, D. (1989a), van der Kuijp (1991b and 1994), Kramer (1999), and Rheingans (2004).

<sup>56</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson (1968: 153 ff.).

<sup>57</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 128). Petech (1990: 85–119) briefly documents the rise of Phag mo gru after the Mongol overlordship. For the life of Byang chub rgyal msthan, see van der Kuijp (1991b and 1994).

<sup>58</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 121).

<sup>59</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson (1968: 180–182). Ruegg (2004b: 326–343) examines Tsong kha pa's impact and exegetical method. For Tsong kha pa's life, see Kaschewsky (1971); for his relation to Re mda' ba, see Roloff (2003).

<sup>60</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 1). See also Dreyfus (2003: 142–48), who discusses the development within the monastic dGe lugs pa centres; see also Dreyfus (2005a: 293).

as bKra shis lhun po (1447) at Shigatse in gTsang. In consequence, the dGe lugs pa became a powerful spiritual and political force in dBus.<sup>61</sup>

Gradually, the Phag mo gru pa's rule was superseded by their own ministers, the lords of Rin spungs pa in eastern gTsang; after the civil war of 1434 and the death of the ruling head, Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1385–1432), the Phag mo gru pa leaders (*gong ma*) Grags pa 'byung gnas (1414–1445) and Kun dga' legs pa (1433–1482) became increasingly weakened.<sup>62</sup> 1478 saw the gradual seizure of power by the Rin spungs pas, under the leadership of mTsho skyes rdo rje (1462–1510) and Don yod rdo rje (1463–1512), general of the Rin spungs pa army encampment. Taking advantage of Phag mo gru pa's weakness, he assumed rule of the crucial rDzong Shigatse in Western Tibet.<sup>63</sup>

The Rin spungs pa were involved in a patron-priest relationship with the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, and supporters of the Seventh Karmapa. The Fourth Zhwa dmar pa was one of the most interesting figures of this period. He also had ties to the Phag mo gru pa and, like 'Gos Lo tsā ba (1392–1481), acted as a teacher of sPyan lnga Ngag gi dbang po (1439–1490), who was installed by the Rin spungs pa as Phag mo gru pa leader (*gong ma*) in 1481.<sup>64</sup> In 1493, after Ngag gi dbang po's passing, the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa was officially installed as sPyan snga of gDan sa thel monastery, the highest religious authority of the Phag mo gru pa. As Ngag gi dbang po's successor was still a minor, the Zhwa dmar pa *de facto* shared political responsibilities with some ministers since 1491.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson (1968: 177–204). See also Ehrhard (2004: 247) for the sponsoring of the dGe lugs pa by the Phag mo gru pa.

<sup>62</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 52).

<sup>63</sup> Shakabpa (1967: 86); Jackson, D. (1989a: 52).

<sup>64</sup> Richardson (1980: 346f.). For the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, see also Ehrhard (2002a: 9–33), Ehrhard (2004:249–250), and Tucci (1949:29–31) (extensive Tibetan sources are *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, pp. 1115–1150, and *Kam tshang*, pp. 194–224). On the occasion of Ngag gi dbang po's installment the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa was present, as was bKra shis dar rgyas, ruler of Bya yul and supporter of Karma 'phrin las pa and the Seventh Karmapa (Ehrhard 2002a: 23, n. 19, who used *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, pp. 1123–1124). For the relation of Bya bKra shis dar rgyas and the Seventh Karmapa and Karma 'phrin las pa, see Rheingans (2004: 64–66) and *Kam tshang*, p. 246.

<sup>65</sup> It is uncertain to what extent the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa was actually involved. dGe lugs historians, such as Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor, believe that he was the instigator of the 1481 invasion—the biography of the Zhwa dmar pa credits him with a diplomatic role (Jackson, D. 1989a: 47, n. 61). Richardson (1980: 347) generally depicts the Zhwa dmar pa as more politically involved than the Karmapa lamas, but his pioneering research was a first attempt to come to terms with the complicated political issues of that time. I shall look forward to the completion of the doctoral thesis *The Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Incarnate: A*

Meanwhile, the Rin spungs pa generals marshalled campaigns to gain control of the Lhasa region. In 1480, Don yod rdo rje closed in on Central Yar klung, together with armies from Yar rgyab and Gong dkar.<sup>66</sup> The dGe lugs pa felt threatened by the growing political power of the Rin spungs pa and their chief gurus; already mounting tensions magnified when, in 1489 and 1490, Don yod rdo rje accompanied the Seventh Karmapa twice to Lhasa, where he laid the foundation for the Thub chen chos 'khor monastery east of the city.<sup>67</sup>

After the Rin spungs pa were temporarily halted by the revolt of the dGa' ldan abbot sMon lam dpal (1414–1491), and distracted by a defeat in rGyal rtse, dBus again became their main focus.<sup>68</sup> This time, they were more difficult to stop. In 1492, an army of gTsang led by Don yod rdo rje and Nang so Kun dga' bkra shis, came through Yar 'brog and took some districts from Yar rgyab, Gong dkar, and sNel.

Then, around 1497, the Seventh Karmapa was attacked by dGe lugs pa monks in the vicinity of Lhasa and only survived by launching an escape to the 'Jo khang temple.<sup>69</sup> The Rin spungs pa and the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa

*Comprehensive Study of the Life and Works of Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524)* by Kamilla Mojzes, University of Bonn, that I am currently co-supervising.

<sup>66</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 38). The Rin spungs pa also appointed gLang ri thang pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan as abbot of the important Sa skya pa monastery Nalendra, which was very close to Lhasa.

<sup>67</sup> According to the spiritual biography of the Seventh Karmapa, he founded the monastery (*Kam tshang*, 1972 edition, *sGrub brgyud karma kam tshang*, vol. I, p. 586: *Lha sa'i shar du thub chen chos 'khor gyi sde'i rmang bting/ 'di la rten 'brel ha cang 'grig che ba ma byung bar rje 'phrin las pa gsung bzhin bstan pa'i rgyun 'bring tsam zhig byung/ der chos rje mi nyag pa gshegs nas karma 'phrin las pa bskos/*.) An earlier passage, describing the spiritual biography of Karma 'phrin las pa, suggests (ibid. p. 652) that Karma 'phrin las pa may also have been involved in laying its foundation stone. In any case, it was situated to the east of Lhasa and Karma 'phrin las pa acted as a teacher there (Rheingans 2004: 72–73, 102–109). Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 37b (p. 223), attributes the founding of Thub chen to the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa.

<sup>68</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 65). The monks of 'Bras spungs and dGa' ldan gathered behind the powerful dGa' ldan and 'Bras spungs abbot, sMon lam dpal. He tried to shake off Rin spungs pa dominance through sorcery and the strengthening of their Central Tibetan patrons. Indeed, they revolted from 1485 to c.1488, when the Rin spungs pa were partly distracted from their hold on Central Tibet, mainly due to a defeat to the forces of rGyal rtse in 1485 (Jackson, D. 1989a: 54–58).

<sup>69</sup> An exact date has not yet been proven, though 1481 or 1497 are likely (Shakabpa 1967: 87; Jackson, D. 1989a: 49, n. 64). Jackson (ibid.) claims the Karmapa was a rather peaceful figure, refraining from using violence here. This incident led, however, to the Bya pa Khrid dpon (a student of the Seventh Karmapa) breaking away from the dBus alliance and joining the gTsang pa forces. To what extent these events motivated the campaigns has not been discovered and should be examined with the aid of proper and extensive source work.

were sorely provoked by the incident, though the Seventh Karmapa tried to calm the situation. Rin spungs pa lords pressed on to control the Lhasa region and 1498 saw their victory: a great army of dBus and gTsang marched to sKyid shod. This time the Bya pa lord, angered by the attack on the Seventh Karmapa, joined in.<sup>70</sup> In 1499, urged by the sTag lung pa and the Seventh Karmapa, the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa negotiated a relatively mild settlement for the sNel pa and dGe lugs monasteries.<sup>71</sup>

The dGe lugs' attack, however, did not go unpunished. Between 1498 and 1517, the Rin spungs pa enjoyed unlimited rule of dBus and gTsang. During this time they did not allow dGe lugs monks of Se ra and 'Bras dpungs to take part in the Great Prayer Festivals (*smon lam chen mo*), which were instead conducted by bKa' brgyud and Sa skya monks.<sup>72</sup>

From 1498 until his death in 1512, general Don yod rdo rje held a most powerful position. Don yod rdo rje commanded the construction of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa's Yangs pa can monastery (situated north of Lhasa) in 1503/1505.<sup>73</sup> This, along with the newly founded Thub chen monastery in the vicinity of Lhasa, may have reinforced the clashes between the dGe lugs pa and the Karma bKa' brgyud.<sup>74</sup> Given this context, it is likely that strategic, rather than religious, motivations were at heart of the issue, since it would have been futile for the Rin spungs pa to gain supremacy over the Phag mo gru pa in Central Tibetan dBus without first controlling the dGe lugs monasteries of Se ra and 'Bras dpungs.<sup>75</sup>

During the Rin spungs control (1498–1517), the Phag mo gru pa under Nga dbang bKra shis grags pa (enthroned in 1499 by the Rin spungs pa) continued to exist as mere figureheads. It was only in 1518, after the Rin spungs pa lords lost direct rule of dBus, that the ban of the dGe lugs monks from the Great Prayer Festival was removed at the petition of dGe 'dun rgya mtsho (1475–1542), the person later referred to as the Second Dalai Lama. He was able to do so in conjunction with the re-emerging power of

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<sup>70</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 39).

<sup>71</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 59) has used *Kam tsang* for the respective paragraph.

<sup>72</sup> In his work on the Second Dalai Lama, Mullin (1994: 94–98) accuses the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa of banning the prayer festivals; according to this author, he was attempting to strengthen his political position. However, he admits (ibid. 98): 'I have not looked into the actual history of the conflict over this festival in detail.'

<sup>73</sup> For the founding of the monastery Yangs pa chen and the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, see Wylie (2003: 485). Richardson (1980: 339) has the founding date of Yangs pa can as 1489.

<sup>74</sup> This was the opinion of the Eighth Karmapa's biographer and attendant Sangs rgyas dpal grub (Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 37b/p. 223).

<sup>75</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 130).

the Phag mo gru pa ruler, who on that occasion (in 1518) donated to him an estate close to 'Bras dpungs called 'Ganden Palace' (dGa' ldan pho brang).<sup>76</sup>

While the successor of the Second Dalai Lama, the Third Dalai Lama bSod nams rgya mtsho (1543–1588), sought to intensify relations with the Mongols, the Seventh and Eighth Karmapas continued to maintain links from afar with the Chinese Ming court, a practice begun by the Fourth Karmapa, Rol pa'i rdo rje.<sup>77</sup>

In summary, the Karma bKa' brgyud enjoyed a period of support from their Rin spungs pa patrons from the 1480s. During the first ten years of the Eighth Karmapa's life, the Rin spungs pa were at the height of their power and wealth, directly ruling major areas of Tibet (dBus, gTsang, and even parts of Nga' ris). The Eighth Karmapa inherited a politically influential yet delicate position in a religious climate of scholastic systematisation and sectarian developments. He avoided the traditional main centres of dBus and gTsang for thirty years until coming to his Central Tibetan main seat mTshur phu in 1537. During the later part of his life, he was confronted by, and had to balance, an unstable situation in dBus and gTsang, involving numerous local lords and ruling families (among others the Rin spungs pa, Phag mo gru pa, and the ascending lords of gTsang, the gTsang ba sDe srid).

This chapter began with a presentation of the sūtra, tantra, and essence Great Seal distinctions of the nineteenth century scholar Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas. Concentrating on sGam po pa's teachings as a key element of early bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal, it has briefly introduced problems of its classification and textual genres as less systematic and situational. After presenting the Great Seal debates and research about Indian sources for non-tantric Great Seal teaching, some of the Eighth Karmapa's contempo-

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<sup>76</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 131). It became the seat of him and his successors and, after 1642, under the Fifth Dalai Lama, the name of the estate became a label for the Central Tibetan government in general.

<sup>77</sup> For the Fourth Karmapa's relation to the Mongols, see Sperling (2004); for the Fifth Karmapa bDe bzhi gshegs pa's relation to Ming China, see Sperling (1980) and Schuh (1976). The Second and the Third Karmapas also had occasional ties with the Mongol court during its overlordship (*Kam tshang*, pp. 386; Richardson 1980: 341–344 and Kapstein 2006b: 131 ff.). The dGe lugs pa ties with the Mongols later ripened when the Fifth Dalai Lama called for help and thereby consolidated his power. But during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the rivalry between dBus and gTsang continued, deepening the rivalry of the dGe lugs and bKa' brgyud schools. During this period the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition still enjoyed influence, a situation that continued until the Tenth Karmapa, Chos dbyings rdo rje (1605–1674) (Smith 2001: 42).

raries and their systematisations were introduced. It was shown how the traditions tried to justify their essential practices. Finally, the political tension between dBus and gTsang and the religious atmosphere of scholasticism and the emerging schools were depicted, where religious hierarchs such as the Karmapa were often unavoidably entangled in political affairs.

## Chapter 3

### Textual Sources for the Eighth Karmapa's Life and Great Seal

Before inspecting the Eighth Karmapa's life and Great Seal, one must analyse the main sources. This chapter investigates the history of the Karmapa's writings, surveys the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, and selects and evaluates the textual sources employed in this thesis.<sup>1</sup> It identifies the closest possible textual witnesses and explains how their genres are particularly suitable.

#### 3.1. History of the Eighth Karmapa's Writings

The most common mode of Tibetan literary production was the hand copying of manuscripts, later adjoined by block-printing techniques. In the early fifteenth century, coinciding with the growth of Tibetan scholasticism, block-printing began to be practised extensively in Tibet and by the late fifteenth century it was used by all major traditions.<sup>2</sup> Block-printing, a

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<sup>1</sup> For a methodologically critical discussion of the use of Tibetan *mam thar* and hagiography for the study of history that expands some of the arguments mentioned later in this chapter, see Jim Rheingans, 'Narratology in Buddhist Studies' in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing*, edited by Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014), 69–112. The discussion of the sources for the life of the Eighth Karmapa under 3.4 is also summarised in the first part of Jim Rheingans 'Narratives of Reincarnation, Politics of Power, and the Emergence of a Scholar: the Very Early Years of Mi bskyod rdo rje and its Sources', in *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined: Biography in the Buddhist Traditions*, edited by Linda Covill, Ulrike Roesler, and Sarah Shaw (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), 241–299.

<sup>2</sup> While research on the history of block-printing is not yet fully exhaustive, it is clear that workshops developed by the fifteenth century (Ehrhard 2012: 149–150). The first Tibetan language blocks were probably the *Guhyagarbhatantra* and the works of Sa skya Paṇḍita printed in Mongolia/China at the Yuan court between 1310 and 1320 (Jackson, D. 1990a: 107 n. 1). The technology took root in Tibet in the fifteenth century, the earliest examples being *Guhyasamājamūlatantra* with Candrakīrti's commentary *Pradīpoddhyotana*, printed 1418–1419, and supervised by Tsong kha pa (Jackson, D. 1983: 5). Some of the old dGa' ldan and Gong dkar xylographs from the beginning of the fifteenth century probably belong to the earliest block prints in Tibet itself (Jackson, D. 1990a: 110). But the first Tibetan



lengthy process involving numerous individuals, necessitated funding for materials and craftsmen. Thus, mainly wealthy patrons or well-connected lamas could generate the funds for the printing projects.<sup>3</sup>

In the bKa' brgyud tradition, printing was partly established by gTsang smyon He ru ka (1452–1507) and some of his students.<sup>4</sup> Projects were also initiated at various bKa' brgyud monasteries, such as the 1520 publication of the works of sGam po pa at Dwags lha sgam po monastery, and the 1539 Rin chen ri bo edition of the collected works of the first Karma 'phrin las pa.<sup>5</sup> sGam po pa's works were mainly compilations that underwent significant alterations; the first blocks were carved in 1520, three-hundred and forty-seven years after his death.<sup>6</sup>

The first edition of the Eighth Karmapa's writings was a manuscript collection compiled in c.1555, soon after the Karmapa's passing in 1554 (without much editing, one presumes); block-prints were presumably issued slightly later. Crucial to the first manuscript compilation were the Eighth Karmapa's students, particularly the Zhwa dmar pa dKon mchog yan lag (1525–1583) and dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1504–1566), who served as scribe for some of the Karmapa's works.<sup>7</sup>

According to the history compiled by Si tu Paṇ chen, the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa met the Eighth Karmapa in the famous pilgrimage area of Tsa' ri and received the blessing (*byin rlabs*) to complete the collection of the Karmapa's writings (*bka' 'bum*). The Zhwa dmar pa obtained myriad Vajrayāna empowerments (*dbang*) and meditation instructions (*khrid*) from

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language bKa' 'gyur—the *Yongle* edition—was printed in 1410 in China (ibid. 111) (for the block-printing technique, see Jest 1961, Grönbold 1982: 386, and Sobisch 2005: 112–114). Still, it was not until the eighteenth century that the first Tibetan block-print edition of the bKa' 'gyur was manufactured in sNar thang in 1730–1732 (Jackson, D. 1990a: 108; Cabezón 2000: 236).

<sup>3</sup> Cabezón (2000: 237), Sobisch (2005: 112 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> For gTsang smyon and his printing activities, see Smith (2001: 59–79); for those of his students, see Ehrhard (2012) and Kragh (2006: 2).

<sup>5</sup> For the literary works of the first Karma 'phrin las pa, see Rheingans (2004: 132–192).

<sup>6</sup> Kragh (2006: 2 ff.).

<sup>7</sup> dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba was a main student of the Karmapa (see Chapter Four (4.2); *Kaṃ tshang*, pp. 357–365 and his spiritual memoir *Rang gi rtogs pa brjod pa 'khrul pa'i bzhin ras 'char ba'i me long zhes bya ba bzhugs so* in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, pp. 1530–1574). He acted as note-taker and scribe for Karmapa VIII, *Slob dpon dbyangs can bzang pos nye bar stsal ba'i dril bu rim pa lnga pa'i khrid*, fol. 103a/p. 981 and *dPal rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje*, fol. 128a/p. 1139.

his guru and noted certain instructions that may have formed the basis for the later table of contents.<sup>8</sup>

The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa began compiling the table of contents in 1547, seven years before the Karmapa passed away, and finished it in 1555, in his Central Tibetan monastery Yangs pa can, one year after the Karmapa's death.<sup>9</sup> This title list (abbreviated *dKar chag*) is valuable for verifying the contents of the Eighth Karmapa's works. The Eighth Karmapa composed an earlier list in 1546 in the context of his spiritual memoir *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*.<sup>10</sup> Both lists are utilised for determining the content and authenticity of the Eighth Karmapa's writings.

In dPa' bo's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, the collected writings (*bka' 'bum*) are stated to amount to 'slightly more than thirty volumes' (*gsum bcu lhag*), though as manuscripts or prints remains unclear.<sup>11</sup> Shortly after the Eighth Karmapa's passing, a golden manuscript, comprising thirty volumes, was made under the patronage of a rich noble nun of sKu rab named Chos mdzad ma rNam grol.<sup>12</sup> The *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* mentions this patronage

<sup>8</sup> Si tu Pañchen, *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 391: *slar tsa' ri mtsho dkar du phebs te bzugs/ rje thams cad mkhyen pa nyi kyi bka' 'bum yongs rdzogs kyi byin rlabs dang/ dbang rjes gnang khrid ka mang du gsan zhing/ der rje'i zhal nas/ so so'i skye bo'i bla ma des dam chos ston pa de yang rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi byin gyis rlabs pa'i mthu yin pas/ zhes sogs kyi zhal gdams gnang ba'i gsung zin bris kyang mdzad/*

<sup>9</sup> *dKar chag*, fol. 14b (p. 27) (*Selected Writings* edition p. 230). It states that the Zhwa dmar pa started when the Eighth Karmapa was forty years old and completed it one year after his death, i.e. 1547–1555. It was completed in the ninth month of the wood-hare year in the ninth cycle in bDe chen Yangs pa can. The *dKar chag* itself could not be dated. It is, however, contained in the collected works of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa dKon mchog 'bangs, *Selected Writings*. This edition consists of cursive written (*dbu med*) manuscripts from the library of the Zhwa dmar Rin po che.

<sup>10</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4b–10a (357–367).

<sup>11</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1313: *bka' 'bum ni rje pakṣi la'ang da lta po ti bcu drug las mi bzugs la rje 'di'i bka' 'bum po ti sum bcu lhag bzugs shing/ gdul bya la rje 'di'i gsung rnam kho na nye bar mkho ba dang*. According to *Kaṃ tshang* (completed 1715), about twenty volumes (*pusti*) made up the Eighth Karmapa's works. Such a difference in volume numbers does not necessarily indicate a different number of texts. (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355: *bka' brtsams kyi skor la/ 'dul ba mdo rta'i 'grel pa/ mdzod ṭika/ 'jug pa dang/ mngon rtogs rgyan ṭika 'bri khung dgongs gcig gi rgyas 'grel/ rlung sems gnyis med kyi khrid yig /mos gus chen mo'i khrid yig dang/ sgyu ma chen mo'i rgyud 'grel sogs mdo sngags kyi gzhung chen du ma dang/ ka lā pa'i zh[wa] lu'i bshad sbyar dang/ sdeb sbyor ṭika'i mchan 'grel/ cha tshad kyi bstan bcos nyi ma'i me long sogs rig gnas kyi skor sogs gsung 'bum pusti nyi shu'i skor*) The 1984 catalogue of the Beijing Nationalities Library claims (Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang (ed.), *Bod gangs can gyi grub mtha'*, p. 17.): 'it is clear in the spiritual biography that there are twenty-eight volumes, however ...' (*pod nyi shu rtsa brgyad tsam yod tshul rnam thar du gsal yang*). However, this claim is not verified in any of the spiritual biographies.

<sup>12</sup> Nor can sKu rab Chos mdzad ma rNam grol.

in the context of a discussion on how 'supports' (*rten*) were erected of the Karmapa's body, speech, and mind at bShad sgrub gling in Dwags po:

This being so, as receptacle of the [enlightened] body, the great statue (*rten*) of bShad grub gling was erected; and the receptacle of speech, a collected sayings (*bka'* 'bum) in gold was issued, sponsored by Chos mdzad ma rNam grol. The receptacle of [enlightened] mind is the special stūpa: And infinite were the receptacles (i.e. stūpas), made by monks and patrons with faith and wealth (*gra yon dad 'byor*) of many different areas, in which there were relics (*gdungs*) [of the Karmapa] with a share for each [contributing party].<sup>13</sup>

A manuscript in golden letters was the most expensive to produce, but their production was not unknown.<sup>14</sup> The sponsoring of such a work proves the nobles of the sKu rab area spared no expenses in supporting their guru, the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>15</sup> Nothing is known today of the remains of the golden manuscript, and the editors of the present *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* did not encounter it.<sup>16</sup>

As the golden manuscript was prepared soon after the Karmapa's death, it is presumed that the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, as his successor (along with

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<sup>13</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1324: *des na sku'i rten du bshad sgrub gling gi rten chen/ gsung gi rten bka' 'bum gser ma chos mdzad ma rnam grol gyis sbyin bdag mdzad nas bzhengs pa dang/ thugs kyi rten mchod rten khyad par can 'di yin la yul gru so so'i gra yon dad 'byor can namas kyis rang rang gi skal ba'i gdung bzhugs pa'i rten bgyis pa ni mtha' yas so*. I interpret *gra yon* (reading *gra* = *grva*) as nominal phrase ("monks and patrons") with *dad 'byor* as adjective. *Gra* could also mean *grwa tshang*, "monastic college".

<sup>14</sup> Writing in gold ink on indigo paper is documented from the seventh century on (Zhongyi 2000: vol. I, 96). During the Yar klung dynasty canonical texts were written in this way. Sometimes silver, turquoise, and other materials were used. In 1413, the king of rGyal rtse financed a golden manuscript of *bKa' 'gyur* based on texts from sNar thang. Zhwa lu Lo tsā ba (1331–1528) spent fifteen years editing a golden *bKa' 'gyur* in the dPal 'khor chos sde monastery (Wangden 2006: 58 ff.).

<sup>15</sup> The area is an ancient division of the Southern Dwags po region (as defined in Zhang Yisun under *dwags po*; see also Dorje 1999: 285–289). The sKu rab nobles had been supporters of the Seventh Karmapa and Karma 'phrin las pa (Rheingans 2004: 25) and continued their patronage with the Eighth Karmapa. The Eighth Karmapa visited this area on various occasions (*Kam tshang*, p. 344, p. 351; Chapter Four (4.1.5, 4.1.6)) and had students from there. See for example, the *bDe mchog sgrub thabs* the Eighth Karmapa taught to sKu rab dbon po Kun dga' (ibid., fol. 2a/p. 803); and the instruction to sKu rab rnam rgyal *sKu rab rnam rgyal la gdams pa* in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *bLa ma'i lam la dga'ba'i slob ma gdams pa*, fol. 30a–33a.

<sup>16</sup> Karma bde legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 2–3. The context of the three 'bases' (*rten*) for body, speech, and mind, in which the passage mentioning the thirty volumes is found, might indicate a similar use for the Eighth Karmapa's collected works. Thus other ink manuscripts, probably the 'slightly more than thirty' volumes already referred to, were copied.

dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba), would have been involved in its production (and that of other early manuscripts in ink).

As receptacle of speech, [Zhwa dmar pa] arranged into a table as many treatises as could be found, in which this very master had made commentaries on the intention of the Buddha-words of sūtra and tantra as his own great texts (*gzhung*) and as commentaries of others; [the table] starting with the words: 'om *siddhirastu*, at once you wish to join peace and great bliss...'. He thus performed the "gathering of the enlightened sayings" (*bka' bsdu*). Meanwhile, Nor can sKu rab Chos mdzad ma did a substantial contribution of [wholesome] causes and conditions, too: the collected sayings in thirty volumes made from gold.<sup>17</sup>

The "gathering of the enlightened sayings" (*bka' bsdu*) is a very striking wording. It most likely illustrates the collecting of texts based on or resulting in a table, but may additionally refer to some kind of public reading (*lung*). The wording certainly seems to be an allusion to the councils of the Buddha. This *dKar chag* acted likely as a template for the earliest manuscript editions. It bears neither page nor volume numbers and offers only a topical outline.<sup>18</sup>

But when were blocks first carved for the Karmapa's works? In the present edition of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, only one text, a Kālacakra commentary, bears a printer's colophon indicating a xylograph printed before the nineteenth century. Concluding verses by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa suggest he witnessed the print process, and that it could well have taken place in Dwags po bShad sgrub gling.<sup>19</sup> As the first manuscript

<sup>17</sup> The gold manuscript and the issuing of the *dkar chag* is also mentioned in the spiritual biography of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 394: *gsung gi rten du mdo sngags kyi bka'i dgongs 'grel rje de nyid kyis rang gzhung dang/ gzhana 'grel du mdzad pa'i bstan bcos ji snyed pa rnams/ om siddhirastu/ gcig tu zhi ba'ang bde chen sbyor bzhed na/ zhes sogs kyi dkar chag tu btad pas bka' bsdu mdzad pa bzhin/ nor can sku rab chos mdzad mas rgyu rkyen gyi nyer len kyang bgyis te/ gser rkyang gis bka' 'bum pusti sum cu/*

<sup>18</sup> The editors of the supplement have pointed this out (*ibid.* p. 2; see below 69–71, for a closer description of the rubrics and structure).

<sup>19</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *bCom ldan 'das dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'i sgrub dkyil phan bde kun stsol*, fol. 87b (p. 617). According to the colophon, this work summarises Kālacakra practice in accordance with commentaries of the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, mTshur phu 'Jam pa'i dbyangs Don grub 'od zer and the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi grags pa. The writer was Karma bDud rtsi zla ba, among others. An official (*nang so*) from sMyug la provided assistance and it was done in his area (i.e. sMyug la). The writing was compiled in a fire-sheep year (1547) during the summer (*chu stod*, Skt. *purvasadha*). It was compared with the text written by Mi bskyod rdo rje himself and underwent corrections. There follow verses paying homage to the Eighth Karmapa, along with information about a print (possibly done later). The verses were composed by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa in the Chos grwa tshang of Karma bShad grub gling. The print was supervised by Kun dga' rin chen and the scribe was Karma Tshe dbang. The blocks were carved by the master Chos

was completed after the Eighth Karmapa's passing, one may conclude that printing occurred between 1554 and 1583, the year of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa's death.

Exploring this hypothesis, it is plausible that the first blocks of a much larger collection were carved under the supervision of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa. Other evidence supports this: the spiritual biography of the First Karma 'phrin las pa (*Karma 'phrin las pa'i rnam thar*), authored by the Eighth Karmapa, is clearly a block print resembling part of a collection bearing the margin *ka* (as the first volume of a collection).<sup>20</sup> When compared to other sixteenth-century prints, similarities become apparent.<sup>21</sup> As block-printing was thriving in the bKa' brgyud pa lineages from the late fifteenth century, it is likely an edition of several major and minor works — if not the whole collection — was printed, presumably in bShad grub gling.

Prints from this period are rare.<sup>22</sup> This lends credibility to the oral history that printing the Karmapa's works was banned or highly restricted after 1642, when the Fifth Dalai Lama assumed power over dBus and gTsang.<sup>23</sup> This is supported by the fact that blocks of the Eighth Karmapa's collected works were found after the dGe lugs takeover in Zas chos 'khor yang rtse, a dGe lugs monastery near Lhasa, where they may have been stored after the ban.<sup>24</sup>

skyong rdo rje slob dpon (probably vajra-master of this monastery) and others. Corrections were made by dBon po dGe legs dbang po.

<sup>20</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun Karma 'phrin las pa'i rnam thar*, blockprint, 7 fols (this work is a copy of a text from the Cultural Palace Library in Beijing, obtained in 2004 from Kurtis Schaeffer via David Jackson, Hamburg). As part of a larger volume, the text does not have a printing colophon.

<sup>21</sup> The print bears a similarity in outline and quality to the Rin chen ri bo edition of the First Karma 'phrin las pa's works, such as the *Dris lan* and *mGur* (Rheingans 2004: 132; 144–181).

<sup>22</sup> Most texts that form the basis for the modern edition from 2000 were manuscripts; at least they do not contain a printing colophon apart from the dPal spungs prints and the one exception mentioned earlier. The subtitle to the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* says: 'Printed from blocks kept at 'Bras spungs dGa' ldan Pho brang and Khams dPal spungs dgon, later reset electronically in Tibet.' (vol. 1, cover title). This is, however, misleading, as most sources were manuscripts (titles also found in the '*Bras spungs dkar chag* are listed there as *bris ma*). The blocks stem mainly from dPal spungs.

<sup>23</sup> Gene Smith, email communication, 13.09.2006 and also Gene Smith in the foreword to Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *sKu gsum ngo sprod* (1978 edition): 'The collected works of Mi bskyod rdo rje fill over 30 volumes. The blocks for printing his *gSung 'bum* were preserved at Zas Chos 'khor yang rtse in Central Tibet but the printing was highly restricted by the authorities.'

<sup>24</sup> Gelek Demo (ed.), *Three dKar Chags*, Introduction, p. iff. A passage in this survey of blocks stored in dBus and gTsang indicates that blocks of the Eighth Karmapa's collected works

Other traceable witnesses for some writings of the Eighth Karmapa are thirteen volumes of manuscripts probably derived from the palace of gTsang, brought to Beijing after 1959 and later returned to Tibet.<sup>25</sup> A table of contents of these manuscripts was published in 1984 and some texts found entry into the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.<sup>26</sup>

During the non-sectarian (*ris med*) movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the scholars of dPal spungs produced new carvings of the blocks for a number of the Eighth Karmapa's studies, such as those on the *Madhyamakāvatāra* and *Vinayasūtra*, and a few other texts such as meditation instructions (*khrid*) and yogic instructions on the inseparability of wind and mind (*lung sems dbyer med*). However, only parts of his *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* were put into print.<sup>27</sup>

The exact history of the literary works of the Eighth Karmapa will be speculative until further sources can be found and examined. At present, it is possible to conclude that the span between the Eighth Karmapa's death and the organising of a manuscript collection was short, and thus a relatively close record of his works is available when using early title lists for verification. Additionally, a possible first printing was issued shortly thereafter, block-prints being rare between the seventeenth and nineteenth century.

### 3.2 *The Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa 2000–2004: Origins and Rubrics*

The twenty-six volume *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* consists of newly discovered texts digitally inputted in Tibetan *dbu chen* script. Its compilation, editing, and printing were funded by the Tsadra Foundation.<sup>28</sup>

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were stored in this monastery (ibid. *Gangs can gyi ljongs su bka' dang bstan bcos sogs*, p. 212: *Zas Chos 'khor yang rtser/ karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i gsung 'bum/*.) This survey was conducted by the sTag regent Ngag dbang gSung rab mthu stobs (1874–1952) in the 1940s or 1950s.

<sup>25</sup> Gene Smith, email communication, 16.11.2006. It is doubtful, where these texts come from or whether they were copies of either the golden manuscript or early prints.

<sup>26</sup> Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang (ed.), *Bod gangs can gyi grub mtha'*, pp. 4–18.

<sup>27</sup> The Karmapa's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa* was printed in 1925. The author of the concluding wishes is the same in other dPal spungs prints and one may conclude most blocks were carved at the start of the twentieth century. As indicated by the concluding wishes, printing was supervised by 'Jam dbyangs Chos kyi rgyal mtshan alias Blo gros rgya mtsho (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi 'grel pa*, vol. II (vol. 11), fol. 504/p. 1008).

<sup>28</sup> Tsadra Foundation was founded by students of the late Kong sprul Chos kyi seng ge (1954–1992), a prominent teacher of the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage in the West (Coleman 1993:

First, one must determine the origin of the textual sources made available with this latest compilation effort. A supplement at least partly authored by Karma bDe legs outlines the sources vaguely.<sup>29</sup> It explains that besides some previously published texts, the central contributions stem from two incomplete versions of the Eighth Karmapa's writings discovered in the monastery of 'Bras spungs.<sup>30</sup> Manuscripts formerly stored in Beijing were integrated; however, of thirteen texts only twelve remained. The order of the texts and the arrangement of volumes were left unclear from the 'Bras spungs material. The editors thus used the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa's table of contents in arranging the collection.<sup>31</sup> As only a single text's origin is expounded in any depth, the sources for the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* are obscure.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, using the editorial supplement and a survey of the individual colophons one can determine the following origins:

- i. Two versions of manuscripts stored in 'Bras spungs (a), manuscripts from the Potala (b), and manuscripts from the Nationalities Palace in Beijing (c).
- ii. Four commentaries from dPal spungs on *Madhyamakāvatāra*, *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, *Vinayasūtra*, and *Abhidharmakośa* (these had been already typed by a team working with dPon slob Rin po che). The supplement does not mention that they also used other dPal spungs prints such as the meditation manuals (*khrid yig*) in two volumes.<sup>33</sup>

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227–228). One of those responsible for compiling and inputting the texts in Lhasa was Karma bDe legs (Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 49; oral communication with Burkhard Quessel, Curator of the Tibetan Collection British Library, London, September 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 4. Some of the titles can be found in the *'Bras spungs dkar chag*, a list of titles from the library of 'Bras spungs monastery. It is, however, unlikely that the editors had access to all the texts or that all of them are still extant: only forty-one titles indicating Mi bskyod rdo rje as author are found, among them, the commentary to the *Mahāmāyātantra*, *Ma hā mā yā'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa* (*'Bras spungs dkar chag*, p. 899). This text is missing from the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* and could not yet be located elsewhere.

<sup>31</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Karma bDe legs discusses some issues surrounding the Karmapa's *gSang sngags snga 'gyur las 'phros pa'i brgal lan rtsod pa med pa'i ston pa dang bstan pa'i byung ba brjod pa drang po'i sa bon* (*Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* vol. 3, pp. 350–486, 69 fols). He states that they found three versions in question: one in 'Bras spungs, one in Nyag rong, and one in Ri bo che (Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 47). For the remaining information, see *ibid.* pp. 2–5.

<sup>33</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gDams khrid man ngag gi rim pa 'chi med bdud rtsi'i ljon bzang*.

- iii. Texts reprinted by the Sixteenth Karmapa in India. (No mention of details is made).
- iv. The text of the Kālacakra commentary (mentioned above), the *Phan bde kun stsol*, printed in woodblocks in Karma bshad sgrub gling and sponsored by *Slob dpon Kun dga' rin chen*, the postscript having been written by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa.
- v. 'Various writings and prints that were found in dBus and gTsang' (*kham sdbus kyi bris dpar ci rigs myed pa rnams*), later specified as from dPal spungs in Khams, Nang chen, Nyag rong.<sup>34</sup> This is the most obscure category.
- vi. Additional texts not mentioned in the table of contents of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa. The editors discovered them, remarking that the name Mi bskyod rdo rje appears on them. But it is unclear whether this is the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>35</sup>
- vii. There is mention of another text which does not appear in the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa's table of contents. The editors consider it to be in the actual handwriting (*phyag bris dngos*) of the Eighth Karmapa. However, no mention is made to which text this refers.

The nature and origin of each text (especially the substantial 'Bras spungs texts) remains unclear. It is certain, however, that most were manuscripts.<sup>36</sup> The procedure for inputting the texts is described as follows: the texts were entered into the computer twice and the two versions compared, then compared six times with the original. Old or deviant spellings were not adapted to a modern standard.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 24. The texts were only identified after a thorough survey and are (all in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, volume number mentioned here for easier reference): *rJe bisun te lo pa chen po'i rnam thar*, vol. 1, pp. 687–718, 16 fols; *rJe bisun nā ro pa chen po'i rnam par thar pa dad pa'i shing rta*, vol. 1, pp. 719–764, 23 fols. *sGam po pa'i rnam thar don gsal sgron med*, vol. 1, pp. 765–800, 18 fols. *bDe mchog sgrub thabs*, vol. 1, pp. 801–804, 2 fols; *Shing rta chen po klu sgrub kyi bzhed pa'i bden gnyis kyi gnas snang thal 'gyur dang rang rgyud smra bas ji ltar 'dod pa dang dpal ldan dwags po brgyud ji ltar bzhed pa'i tshul gcig pa'i nges don 'khrul bral gyi glu dpal dbyangs can dga' bas mdzad pa*, vol. 2, pp. 524–567, 27 fols (the latter title was inserted a second time in vol. 25, pp. 7–26, 10 fols; this second version indicates the Eighth Karmapa as author).

<sup>36</sup> As briefly mentioned in a note above, the few texts listed in the 'Bras spungs dkar chag possibly indicates that these texts were used, but doubts remain—some texts listed there are still missing and only forty-one titles are listed.

<sup>37</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 5.



The invaluable merit of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* is that previously inaccessible works have now been made available. But philologically problematic areas remain. Some orthographical mistakes are not due to older spelling. Further, the actual texts in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* do not always correspond with the arrangement of texts in the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa's *dKar chag*. In certain cases, several texts were mistakenly placed under one heading, giving the impression that texts were missing; two texts were inserted twice.<sup>38</sup> At the end of the editorial supplement a list of texts not yet found (but listed in the table by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa) was appended. However, the list is misleading: some texts listed are not missing and some missing were not listed.<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that the editors were probably aware of these slight errors, as they termed the compilation the first step (*gom pa dang po*) towards safeguarding the texts.<sup>40</sup> This could have been achieved even more effectively had they also reproduced a facsimile edition of the original manuscripts.

Having surveyed the origins of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, its rubrics must briefly be considered. This permits not just an understanding of textual contexts, but illustrates the breadth of the Eighth Karmapa's scholarship. The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa split *dKar chag* into six sections (*mdor byas*), further subdivided.<sup>41</sup> The first section (i) contains 'the spiritual biographies which proclaim the good conduct of the [master] himself and others' (*rang gzhan legs spyad sgrogs pa'i nam thar*, i.a) and the vajra-songs (*rdo rje'i glu*, i.b). These are found in volumes one and two of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.

The second section (ii), filling volume three, contains a variety of texts: letters (*'phrin yig*, ii.a), praises (*bstod tshogs*, ii.b), questions and answers (*dris lan*, ii.c), advices (*bslab bya*, ii.d), and prayers (*smon lam*, ii.e). The

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<sup>38</sup> The *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* summarises thirty-six short instructions listed separately in the *dKar chag* (fol. 5b) as only one title *bLa ma'i lam la dga' ba'i slob ma gdams pa*, fol. 8a–9a (p. 579–581). The *bCom ldan 'das dus kyi 'khor lo'i ye shes btsan thabs su dbab pa'i cho ga rje btsun mar rgnog na brgyud pa* (*Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* vol. 1, pp. 805–824, 11 fols.) belongs, according to *dKar chag* (fol. 21a) to a later place, where it was inserted again (vol. 25, pp. 38–58); see also note 37 above. These are only two examples.

<sup>39</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 44–46. See below, for a brief outline of missing texts.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> See *dKar chag*, fol. 1b (p. 2), for the section distinctions described in the following. Under each heading there are further subdivisions (ibid. fol. 2a/p. 4, fol. 7b/p. 13, fol. 12a/p. 22, fol. 14a/p. 26).

third section (iii), labelled 'extensive commentaries which clarify the intended meaning of sūtra and mantra' (*mdo sngags rnams kyi dgongs don gsal byed pa'i rgyas 'grel rnams*), comprises volumes four to sixteen and includes commentaries on Indian treatises (*rgya gzhung*). Volumes seventeen and eighteen contain the texts of section four (iv): the rituals (*cho ga*) and *sādhana*s (Tib. *sgrub thabs*) 'for granting the state of the vajra-body' (*rdo rje'i sku yi go 'phang sbyin pa'i phyir cho ga sgrub thabs*). The fifth section (v) consists of, among other texts, the meditation instructions (*khrid*) and is found in volumes nineteen to twenty-five. The sixth section (vi) is designated the 'common sciences' (*thun mong rig gnas*), such as grammar and linguistics, and fills the twenty-sixth and hereby the final volume.

The table by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa lists over four hundred texts. Approximately two hundred and fifty entries are found in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*. However, a few titles are subsumed under one entry in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, increasing the number of texts to around three hundred. Three works not included in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* (but listed in either of the title lists) can be located elsewhere, mainly on microfilms of the NGMCP.<sup>42</sup>

Collating the texts available with the table by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, fifty-two works are presently missing. Most missing texts indicate that parts of certain sections are missing, for example the first eleven titles of the letter section (*sprin yig*, ii.a) and a few entries of the praises (*bstod tshogs*, ii.b). Additionally, some shorter commentaries and a disputational text (*dgag lan*) cannot be found in the commentary section.<sup>43</sup> Within the ritual section, mainly works on the Kālacakra, Cakrasaṃvara, and cutting (*gcod*) practices have yet to be located, and from the grammatical treatises only the commentary on Sanskrit grammar is extant.<sup>44</sup> Other missing texts are: a

<sup>42</sup> Among these, a manuscript that will be used in this thesis is *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *mNyams med dags* [sic!] *po bka' brgyud kyi gdam pa'i srogi* (abbrv. for *srog gi*) *yang snying*, (NGMPP, Reel no. E 12794/6) 9 fols (listed in *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 8a/p. 364). Those listed in *dKar chag* are: *gZhan stong legs par smra ba'i sgron me* (NGMPP, Reel no. 2496/3) 20 fols, blockprint; *dGongs gcig kar ſik dum bu lnga pa* (NGMPP, Reel No. E 2943/3), 151 fols, manuscript, *dbu med*; *Gangs ri'i khrod na gnas pa gtse? rdor? grur? pa skyabs med ma rgan? tshogs la sha zar mi rung ba'i springs yig sogs* (NGMPP Reel No. E 2943/4) 26 fols.

<sup>43</sup> For the missing letters and praises, see *dKar chag* fol. 4a (p. 6); see *ibid.* fol. 8b (p. 15), for the *dGa' ldan gangs can phyi ma dag gi lta grub kyi nram gzhag la brgal lan nges don rdo rje'i zer phreng*.

<sup>44</sup> For the missing ritual texts, see *dKar chag* fol. 21a/p. 20 (an example is the practice of the white Cakrasaṃvara entitled *bDe mchog dkar po'am sgrub dkyil dpal ldan bla ma dam pa*

commentary on *Mahāmāyā* (*sGyu ma chen mo'i rgyud 'grel*), a treatise on the proportions (*Cha tshad kyi bstan bcos nyi ma'i me long*), a commentary on synonyms (*sDeb sbyor ũka'i mchan 'grel*), and the *Mos gus chen mo'i khrid yig* (*Meditation Manual on Great Devotion*).<sup>45</sup>

Despite some philological infelicities of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, the textual material relevant to this research is predominantly complete: significant early spiritual biographies are available and relevant texts on the Great Seal are abundant. Assertions made are thus grounded on a relatively complete foundation of primary sources.

### 3.3 Sources on the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal

As one strain of this thesis investigates how the Karmapa taught the Great Seal to particular students, shorter works emerging from or documenting specific teaching situations are employed. Case studies in Chapter Five investigate the dialogues in a spiritual biography (a genre treated below), a question and answer text, an esoteric precept (*man ngag*), and a piece of advice (*bslab bya*). Justification and detailed outline of these 'instruction genres' is the focus of Chapter Five. Writings from these genres, along with other meditation instructions (*khrid*) and commentaries, form the core of Chapter Six. This section discusses the main sources and genres, some additionally employed texts and the overall occurrence of the Great Seal in the Eighth Karmapa's writings.

The question and answer texts of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* are contained in volume three (section ii.c). Question and answer texts (*dris lan*) are predominantly written answers to one or more questions,

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*rdo rje 'chang chen po tshe gcig la sgrub byed bcom ldan 'das rdo rje 'chang chen po nas rtsa ba'i bla ma'i bar du byon pa'i thugs la gab pa'i man ngag*). *Ka lā pa'i mdo'i 'grel pa gzhung don gsal ba* (*Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 26) is the Karmapa's commentary on grammar. For the three missing grammatical treatises, see *dKar chag*, fol. 14a /p. 26. The Eighth Karmapa's treatises on traditional Tibetan grammar (*sum bcu pa, rtags 'jug*) and composition (*sdeb sbyor*) are not available.

<sup>45</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355: *bka' brtsams kyi skor la/ 'dul ba mdo rta'i 'grel pa/ mdzod ũka/ /jug pa dang/ mngon rtogs rgyan ũka 'bri khung dgongs gcig gi rgyas 'grel/ rlung sems gnyis med kyi khrid yig /mos gus chen mo'i khrid yig dang/ sgyu ma chen mo'i rgyud 'grel sogs mdo sngags kyi gzhung chen du ma dang/ ka lā pa'i zh[w]a lu'i bshad sbyar dang/sdeb sbyor ũka'i mchan 'grel/ cha tshad kyi bstan bcos nyi ma'i me long sogs rig gnas kyi skor sogs gsung 'bum pusti nyi shu'i skor* The *Mos gus chen mo'i khrid yig* may be the *Mos gus phyag chen gyi khrid zab mo rgyal ba rgod thsang pa'i lugs* in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 19, pp. 679–725, 24 fols. This is the only missing work of potential interest to this thesis.

often similar to letters and advices or occasionally instructions or precepts.<sup>46</sup> The genre already existed in India under the designation *praśnottara*,<sup>47</sup> and its Tibetan form has not been extensively studied.<sup>48</sup>

Question and answer texts figure prominently among early sources on the Great Seal; a significant portion of sGam po pa's *bka' 'bum* consist of questions and answers, meditation instructions, or notes (*zin bris*). While their contextual nature has not been explored, D. Jackson has drawn attention to the possibility that teachings were adapted to individual students.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, each of the twenty-five Indian *amanasikāra* works was Maitrīpa's reply to a different question.<sup>50</sup>

The question and answer section in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* consists of sixteen texts (no. 29 to 44 of volume three), varying in

<sup>46</sup> In the case of the Eighth Karmapa's teacher, Karma 'phrin las pa, one finds eleven answers to questions in his writings. Topics range from questions on Buddhist vows, history, and Madhyamaka to tantric practice and the Great Seal. In most cases, the answers refer to written questions (e.g. in the form of a letter) and the reply can be assumed to have been formulated in writing, though the colophons do not always clearly indicate this (Rheingans 2004: 180–200).

<sup>47</sup> A term deriving from *praśna*, m – 'question'. With *uttara* it becomes *praśna-uttara* 'question and answer' (Monier Williams 1996).

<sup>48</sup> Zhang Yisun: *dri lan - gtam dri ba dang/ lan 'debs pa* = 'to ask a question and give a reply' thus: 'question and answer' and *ibid.*: *dris lan – dri bar btab pa'i lan/* = 'an answer to an asked question' thus 'answer to questions'. A related genre, the more polemical 'answers to refutations' (*dgag len*), has been examined to some extent by Lopez (1996). However, these respond to criticism rather than answer questions. Whereas *dgag len* have found entry into Cabezón and Jackson's typology (under 'Philosophical Literature'), the question and answer genre was overlooked (Cabezón and Jackson 1996: 30). Though no specific reason is given, this may have resulted from the sheer variety of topics they cover, which defies a strict content-based typology.

<sup>49</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 32), referencing sGam po pa's *Phag mo gru pa'i zhus lan*, hints at teaching strategy. For the texts in the *Dwags po bka' 'bum* see Sherpa (2004: 95–125) and Kragh (1998: 12–26). Questions and answers (*ibid.* 18–20) such as the *Phag mo gru pa'i zhus lan* and the *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan* became prominent sources for Jackson, D. (1994: 25, 27, 30, 32) and Martin (1992: 244, 245, 247, 249). The teachings to an assembly (*tshogs chos*) were often notes of public teaching sessions (Kragh 1998: 15–17). Some early material on the Great Perfection consists of question and answer texts, such as the *rDo rje sems pa'i zhu lan* (Q, no. 5082); a version is also found among the *Dun huang* material (see Van Schaik 2004: 172, for a detailed account.) Sherpa (2004: 179) suggests that sGam po pa's teaching in general was very audience oriented.

<sup>50</sup> Mathes (2011: 96, n. 29) quotes the unpublished manuscript 'Bri gung chos mdzod, vol. ka, fol. 4a (quoted after Mathes): *de nas mai [text: me] tri pas lta ba rab tu mi gnas pa / bsgom pa yid la mi byed pa la sogs pa'i dam bca' mdzad pa la / so so'i dris lan gzhung phran nyi shu rtsa lnga byung la slob ma rnams kyi yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor nyi shu rtsa lnga zhes pa'i tha snyad byas sol.*

length from two to sixty-nine folios.<sup>51</sup> From among the sixteen question and answer texts, ten contain major passages or questions related to the Great Seal.<sup>52</sup> This thesis has chosen the *gLing drung pa a 'dor ba'i dris lan* (*Answer to a Question by gLing drung A 'dor ba*) for a detailed case study. It presents doctrines and stories centring on the criticism of Sa skya Paṇḍita and the topics of tantra and essence of the Great Seal, as well as remarkable historical details.

Adjoining this, passages from other texts are drawn on for doctrinal comparisons: *bLa ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, 3 fols (*Answer to a Question by Lama Khams pa [About] One Person having two [Kinds of] Mind*), *Shel dkar bla ma chos kyi rgyal mthsan gyi dris lan*, 3 fols (*Answer to a Questions of Shel dkar Lama chos kyi rgyal mthsan*), and *Ne ring pa 'phags pa'i dris lan*, 6 fols (*Answer to a Question by Ne ring pa 'Phags pa*).

Pieces of advice (*bslab bya*) bear similarities to both meditation instructions and letters, often being written and sent upon the request of an individual. Of fifty-four advices (*bslab bya*) in volume three of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, eight consider the Great Seal. The two used as main sources are *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag*, 2 fols (*Great Seal Esoteric Precept*) and the *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, 10 fols (*Identification of the Blessing of the Great Seal*).<sup>53</sup>

Meditation instructions (*khrid*) and esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) are closely related key genres for Tibetan Buddhist practice.<sup>54</sup> The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa labelled the *khrid* section of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* 'the sūtra and tantra instructions which apply one to the highest

<sup>51</sup> One title is thus far missing: *Ne ring yig mkhan gyi dris lan* (*dKar chag*, fol. 5b /p. 9).

<sup>52</sup> Apart from the Great Seal, topics range from the practice of transmission [of consciousness] ('*pho ba*) (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma bstan 'dzin gyi 'pho ba'i dris lan*, 3 fols) to the ritual practice of the protector Mahākāla (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *dPal ye shes mgon po sgrub pa mams kyi dris lan*, 3 fols). A debate with the rNying ma pa is also included.

<sup>53</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag* is contained in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *bLa ma'i lam la dga' ba'i slob ma gdams pa*, fol. 8a–9a (p. 579–581). In the title list by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa the texts are listed separately and this one is entitled *Phyag rgya chen po man ngag tu gdams pa* (*dKar chag*, fol. 6a/p. 10).

<sup>54</sup> Some use instructions (*gdams ngag*) as overarching category, some authors prefer meditation instructions (*khrid*). Kapstein (1996: 275–276) notes the similarity of *gdams ngag* and *man ngag* and their relation to related genres. The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa subsumes instructions under the heading of *khrid* (*dKar chag*, fol. 12a/p. 22). The closest Indian template is the *upadeśa*, rendered in Tibetan as *man ngag* (also found for *man ngag* is *āmnāya*; further Skt. *nīta* for Tib. *khrid* and Skt. *āvavādaka* for Tib. *gdams ngag*).

magical absorptions' (*sgyu 'phrul ting 'dzin mchog la sbyor byed pa'i mdo sngags khrid*).<sup>55</sup> Of those, the shorter meditation instructions (*khrid thung*) in volume nineteen are of particular note. This thesis refers to passages from the *Phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i zin bris*, 3 fols (*Note of the Prerequisites for Cultivating the Great Seal*) and *Kam tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, 20 fols (*Meditation Instruction for the Kam tshang Great Seal Practice*).

The major instructions contained in volumes twenty to twenty-five focus mainly on Great Seal in its tantric context, discussing the six doctrines and the subtle energy systems alongside elaborate descriptions of completion stage practices.<sup>56</sup> This thesis occasionally refers to passages in two lengthy works in volume twenty-four.<sup>57</sup>

Regarding other occurrences of the Great Seal in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, we find texts in the vajra song (*rdo rje'i glu*) section (i.b), not taken into consideration, and in a bulk of material in the commentary section. Among those, this thesis refers to the previously studied introduction to the Madhyamaka commentary *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*. Volumes five, six, and seven are devoted to the *dgongs gcig* ('same intention') teaching of the 'Bri gung pa, relevant to the Great Seal. Shorter commentaries dealing with key areas of the Great Seal can be found in volume fifteen. Of these, the thesis employs the *Glo bur gyi dri ma tha mal gyi shes par bshad pa'i nor pa spang ba*, 5 fols (*Giving up the Mistake to Explain Superficial Obscuration as the Ordinary Mind*), as it presents a comparatively comprehensive overview.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa divided this point into further subtopics. The scheme Zhwa dmar pa used is the famed four dharmas of sGam po pa, which denote a stepwise progress through the stages of Buddhist practice: *dKar chag*, fol. 12a (p. 22): *mdor byas lnga pa la blo chos su 'gro ba'i khrid/ chos lam du 'gro ba'i khrid/ lam 'khrul pa sel ba'i khrid/ 'khrul pa ye shes su 'char ba'i khrid de bzhi las*. See Sherpa (2004: 137–142) on sGam po pa's four dharma theory and its interpretations by Padma dkar po and La yag pa.

<sup>56</sup> See for example the Eighth Karmapa's Mi bskyod rdo rje's bulky *sKu gsum ngo sprod* (874 fols) and *Lung sems gnyis med* (287 fols) volumes. Far too extensive and slightly deviant from the main topic of this thesis, these yogic instructions deserve future attention.

<sup>57</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po sgros 'bum* (233 fols) and *dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung las 'phros pa'i 'bel gnam kha shas* (109 fols).

<sup>58</sup> This work also appears in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGyal dbang karma pa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad sogs*, vol. 3, pp. 393–408, 8 fols and in *Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 8 (nya), pp. 475–488. The other texts are: *Hva shang dang 'dres pa'i don mdzud tshugs su bstan pa Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1083–1094, 6 fols; *Yid la mi byed pa'i zur khra*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1095–1100, 3 fols (*Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 8 (nya), pp. 507–514); *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*, *Collected Works of the*

### 3.4 *Spiritual Memoirs and Biographies of the Eighth Karmapa*

The primary sources used to examine the Eighth Karmapa's life belong to the *rnam thar* and *rang nam* genres (translated as 'spiritual biography' and 'spiritual memoir', respectively). These provide the greatest detail of events in the life of a Tibetan saint; being a type of hagiography as studied in other religious contexts.<sup>59</sup> Considered 'tradition' as opposed to 'remains', the label '*rnam thar*' signifies that they were intended to be read as an account of a saint's life.<sup>60</sup>

Spiritual biographies vary immensely in both type and scope, ranging from informative life accounts, rich in historical and ethnographic detail, to tantric instructions, eulogies, and even works containing empowerment rituals. However, predominantly they form a narrative genre in which certain topoi of the life of a Buddhist saint are included, ones easily discernable to readers and forming the key constituents of the plot.<sup>61</sup> As with other aspects of Tibetan Studies, the *rnam thar* genre has not been extensively examined by academics.<sup>62</sup>

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*Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1025–1038, 7 fols; *Rang la nges pa'i tshad ma zhes bya ba'i 'grel pa gnas lugs bdud risi'i nyin khu*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1039–1058, 10 fols; *rGya gar gyi phyag chen sngon byung dwags brgyud kyi sgros kyis rgyan pa*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1059–1071, 7 fols (*Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 8 (*nya*), pp. 489–506); *rJe btsun mi las rje sgam po pa gdams pa'i mgur 'grel*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1105–1110, 3 fols (*Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 8 (*nya*), pp. 431–434).

<sup>59</sup> Other genres that can assist the acquiring of information regarding the life of a Tibetan master are abbatial chronicles (*gdan rabs*), records of teachings received (*gsan yig*, *thob yig*; see Sobisch 2003b), and tables of contents (*dkar chag*). This thesis additionally uses the colophons of texts written by the Eighth Karmapa and the previously mentioned title lists and table of contents.

<sup>60</sup> 'Remains' is used for artefacts; not intended as sources for the subject investigated. However, the classification seems to be controversial (Faber and Geiss 1992: 82ff.). Marwick (2001: 172–179) discusses what he terms 'witting and unwitting testimony'. The extent to which, in Tibetan culture, the *rnam thar* genres provide what one may term 'historical information' depends on individual texts.

<sup>61</sup> For the role of these occurrences, see Reginald A. Ray's introduction to Thinley (1980: 1–19).

<sup>62</sup> In his study of Tibetan historiographical literature, van der Kuijp (1996: 46–47) examined the 'history of religion' *chos 'byung* genre to some extent. Analysis of Indian spiritual biographies is found in Robinson (1996) and of Tibetan spiritual memoirs (*rang nam*) in Gyatso (1998: 101–123). Scattered remarks can be located in the studies mentioned below. Southeastern Buddhist hagiography has been studied by Kieschnick (1997) and Tambiah (1984). Compared to Buddhist hagiography, Christian hagiography has been studied extensively; see Dubois and Lemaître (1993), for research about Christian hagiography; and Head (2000), for an anthology of medieval Christian hagiography.

Roberts has indicated that the term *nam thar* in a Tibetan title probably first occurred within the early bKa' gdams pa traditions and was also used by sGam po pa. Early bKa' gdams pa scholars likely adapted the term as found in a verse of the translated *Bodhicāryāvatāra*.<sup>63</sup> The term *nam thar* translates the Sanskrit *vimokṣa*, meaning 'liberation, the experience of a meditating saint'.<sup>64</sup> A Tibetan definition of the term *nam thar* claims: '(i) a historical work of the deeds of a holy (*dam pa*) person or a treatise which tells his [religious] achievement; (ii) liberation.'<sup>65</sup> To emphasise the fact that these works portray the liberation or accomplishment of a person, one could render the term 'liberation story'; to nuance their historical content 'spiritual biography' is also appropriate and is the rendition chosen for this thesis. The related *rang nam* genre (literally 'one's own liberation [story]') may be translated as 'spiritual memoir'. The mere use of 'biography' or 'autobiography' overlooks the primary function of the genre.<sup>66</sup>

Previous scholars have interpreted and used texts of this genre in various ways.<sup>67</sup> While critiques are meaningful and necessary, a too one-sided interpretation may distort comprehension of the *nam thar* genre. When employing the genre for research, one must be aware of the cultural standards of the civilization of its origin and view it primarily as a religious

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<sup>63</sup> Roberts (2007: 3–5) points out that in *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, V. 103, the term is used to indicate a part of the *Gaṇḍhavyūhasūtra*. Some actual *nam thar* texts were probably patterned after Indian examples of spiritual biography, for instance *avādāna* ('presentation of an accomplishment') and *jātaka* ('stories of the previous rebirths' of the Buddha).

<sup>64</sup> Smith (2001: 273, n. 2). A noun form of *vi-mokṣ*, A. 'to wish to free oneself, to free one's self from', also related to *vi-muc*, 'to unloose, to unharness' (Monier Williams 1996). Tibetans mechanically rendered the prefix *vi* with the prefix *nam pa* and *mokṣa* with *thar p/ba*, hence: *nam par thar ba*, transformed into *nam par thar pa* and then abbreviated to *nam thar*.

<sup>65</sup> Zhang Yisun: *nam thar* – 1. *skyes bu dam pa'i mdzad spyod lo rgyus kyi gzhung ngam/rtoṅs pa brjod pa'i bstan bcos*/ 2. *nam grol*. A related genre, *rtoṅs brjod* (Skt. *avādāna*), literally means 'presentation of an accomplishment'.

<sup>66</sup> Although the subject of the work is the life of a Buddhist master and contains some historical information, the title and its primary content is to tell the story of a person's spiritual development and not to give historical detail about his career or motives. That rather implies 'liberation', not 'biography' (see also Ruegg 1966: 66). Dargyay (1994: 99) uses 'features of liberation'. For a study of English biographies, see for example Pritchard (2005).

<sup>67</sup> Gyatso (1998: 107–109) tends to see *rang nam* as more closely related to the Western genre of autobiography in that postmodern theories of the self can be usefully applied to its study. Schuh and Schwieger (1985: XXIXf.) have focused on the writers hidden motives: for example favouritism towards their own tradition and particularly their own monastery.



narrative.<sup>68</sup> Willis has further argued that a major function is not only to inspire the reader but also impart exoteric and esoteric instruction. She has interpreted the sometimes used outer, inner, and secret (*phyi*, *nang*, and *gsang*) levels of *nam thar* as: (i) the 'historical,' (ii) the 'inspirational', and (iii) the 'instructional' dimension.<sup>69</sup> Those sources used in this thesis are mainly belonging to the outer level; the spiritual memoirs can also be regarded as inner. Smith had already succinctly summarised the genre's main characteristics in 1969:

The *nam thar* genre [is] a type of literature that the non-Tibetan will equate with biography or hagiography. Yet while there is often much in a *nam thar* that is of biographical nature, a *nam thar* has for the Buddhist a considerably greater significance. (...) The *nam thar* is ultimately a practical instruction, a guide to the experience, insights, and vision of one developed being.<sup>70</sup>

Spiritual biographies thus have more functions than narrating the life of a saint: they act as role model and instruction for Buddhist practitioners.<sup>71</sup> But who are the role models a Tibetan medieval saint is meant to emulate? Tiso elaborates on three types of Buddhist roles intended to inspire: (i) the *arhat* in the Theravāda tradition, (ii) the bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna, and (iii) the *mahāsiddha* in the Vajrayāna. In Tibet, which produced an exceptional number of these texts, the ideal projected on some early bKa' brgyud pa masters such as Marpa was the third: the tantric saint, the 'great accomplished one' or *mahāsiddha*.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Such an evaluation is suggested by Robinson regarding the *nam thar* of great Indian adepts, arguing they should be read as hagiography, not as biography (Robinson 1996: 64). The opposite approach would be a sentimental and naïve manner of approaching a text.

<sup>69</sup> Willis (1995: 5). This interpretation is useful, though it may have to be adapted to various types of *nam thar*. Templeman (2003: 141) argues that understanding the genre as inspirational has become commonplace. He asserts that his contribution, viewing the genre as an actual instruction, would be new knowledge. However, in light of Willis' work published almost ten years earlier, this seems outdated.

<sup>70</sup> Smith (2001: 13), a reprint of a foreword from 1969.

<sup>71</sup> Karma Thinley Rinpoche, a contemporary master of the bKa' brgyud and Sa skya traditions, explains his motives for composing such a work: 'I wish to demonstrate the marvellous example set forth by former masters such as the First Karma Thinleypa, in their spiritual training and work for sentient beings' (Thinley 1997: 1).

<sup>72</sup> According to the bKa' brgyud traditions' 'golden rosary' narratives (*gser phreng*), spiritual biographies reflect the enlightened principle of the tantric Buddha Vajradhara (Tiso 1989: 113ff.). See Roberts (2007), for a study of the evolution of the spiritual biography of Ras chung pa. For sources on the life of Marpa, see Martin (1984); for a detailed—albeit controversial—discussion of his life vis-à-vis the roles projected upon him by the tradition, see Davidson (2004: 141–148).

Additionally, following the introduction of incarnation as a model of spiritual succession and the monasticisation of lay tantric lineages, the dimension of the reincarnate monk is often added to narratives of incarnate lamas like the Karmapa, depicting the 'abstract role of an incarnate lamaist priest'.<sup>73</sup> The Karmapas are supposed to mirror all three levels of the perceived levels of the Buddha's teaching.<sup>74</sup>

Given the information presented, this thesis presumes spiritual biographies to have a multi-dimensional function, encapsulating historical record and religious instruction, and acting as a vehicle for cultural and religious identity.

When using spiritual biographies as academic sources, it is important to analyse their content with regard to narrative function. Though in this thesis it is considered admissible to use the 'filter method', i.e. to 'filter' historical facts from the text, whether information can be taken at face value depends on each source and the function of particular events in the story.<sup>75</sup> If there is a significant chronological gap, the narratives may conceivably tell us more about the ideas prevalent at the author's time than the historical facts of the protagonist. It has been shown, for example, that elements of Ras chung pa's and Mi la ras pa's spiritual biographies emerge from inventive story telling, but also that *nam thar* usually develop from earlier realism to later idealisation.<sup>76</sup>

Detailed study of the principal sources used in depicting the Eighth Karmapa's life determines the most reliable and early works and investigates their content and intertextuality. As well as preparing the way for the ensuing chapters, this will facilitate work for future researchers, as most sources have not been previously used.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Schuh and Schwieger (1985: XXIX).

<sup>74</sup> Jampa Thaye in his preface to *History of the Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet* (Thinley 1980: 21–38). The function of visions and miracles is also described. The three levels of Buddhist teaching are reflected in the three vow theories which developed to a considerable level in Tibet (see Sobisch: 2002a).

<sup>75</sup> A term used by Mills in an address to the Tibetologists present at the International Association for Tibetan Studies Conference, Bonn, August 2006.

<sup>76</sup> Roberts (2007) has undertaken an extensive comparative study of various versions of Ras chung pa's spiritual biography, which span several centuries. One example is the story of the yak horn (ibid. 183–210).

<sup>77</sup> In order to assess a clear timeline of the events in the Eighth Karmapa's life, all colophons of his written works are used. For an exhaustive study of the Eighth Karmapa's life, one should also take into account works such as the spiritual songs (*mgur*), along with some letters to leading political figures. Here, only the spiritual biographies are used.

(a) *Spiritual Memoirs by the Eighth Karmapa*

Nine sources attribute their authorship to the Eighth Karmapa.

(i) *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar legs spyad mar grags pa rje nyid kyis mdzad pa* (4 fols) is a short text composed in verse.<sup>78</sup> In the beginning, the Karmapa states he has written on his experiences at some students' request; specified in the interlinear commentary (*mchan*) to be 'Bri gung Rin po che and Paṇ chen rDor rgyal ba.<sup>79</sup> The work is an instruction with philosophical and motivational content; dates and information regarding events in his life are completely absent. A text designed as a commentary ('*grel pa*) to this work is one of the significant spiritual biographies by his early students (examined below).

(ii) *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar la bslab pa'i khrid*<sup>80</sup> (18 fols) is a spiritual memoir designed as an instruction to the Eighth Karmapa's disciples. Though few dates are mentioned, the influence of his teachers is illustrated well. Composed in 1536 (thirtieth year), the Karmapa revised it later, in 1548 (forty-second year). The work is an outline of the Karmapa's practice steps, experiences, and reliance on his four great teachers (*rje btsun chen po bzhi*).<sup>81</sup> He explains that it is rare to meet a qualified teacher and that false teachers abound, concluding by saying that authentic teachers do not place liberation in the student's hand, but that one should see the teacher's qualities and emulate his practice.<sup>82</sup>

(iii) *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar rje nyid kyis nram thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa*<sup>83</sup> (7 fols) is a short account in verse composed in his twenty-eighth year (1534) in rNam thos kyi ri bo. It details the main phases of the Karmapa's life from his perspective, occasionally providing dates. It is crucial in that it exposes some of the motivations and feelings of the Karmapa himself.

(iv) *rJe mi bskyod rdo rje'i 'phral gyi nram thar tshigs su bcad pa nyer bdun pa rje nyid kyis mdzad pa*<sup>84</sup> (3 fols) comprises twenty-seven verses of

<sup>78</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 107–114. Though full references are to be found in the bibliography, they are given here for easier access.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 1a (p. 108).

<sup>80</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 115–149.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 3a (p. 119).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 17b (p. 148).

<sup>83</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 331–343. Title variants *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar rje nyid kyis nram thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa* and from the *dKar chag*: *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar (...)*.

<sup>84</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 344–349.

motivational teachings, and could be considered a 'song of experience' (*nyams mgur*). It was composed in the Karmapa's thirty-third year (1539) at mTshur phu.

(v) *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*<sup>85</sup> (19 fols) begins with an autobiographical summary of the Karmapa's life up to his fortieth year (1546). Therein he briefly describes how he attended his teachers and lists his compositions. This list is a valuable resource (next to the *dKar chag*) for determining the content and authenticity of the Eighth Karmapa's writings and is used throughout the thesis.

(vi) *gDul bya phyi ma la gdams pa'i rnam par thar pa*<sup>86</sup> (16 fols) is a part of the Karmapa's spiritual biography taught to his students. It contains autobiographical elements and mainly describes his spiritual development. The word 'instruction' (*gdams pa*) in the title indicates the work was designed as such; consequently, it found entry in the 'advice' (*bslab bya*) section of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.

(vii) *Nyid bstod kyi rang 'grel*<sup>87</sup> (5 fols) is a peculiar work: a commentary by the Eighth Karmapa on a 'self praise' (*nyid bstod*) also attributed to the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>88</sup> It considers Buddhist tantra and philosophy.

(viii) *rGyal ba karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar bdag tshul bcu gnyis*<sup>89</sup> (10 fols) is a spiritual memoir written in 1527 in Kong po. The Karmapa's story is therein fashioned after the ideal of the twelve deeds of the Buddha. The Karmapa's sojourn in the pure land of Maitreya is depicted, a mystic place where he is supposed to have dwelt before his birth. It contains descriptions of various Buddhist practices undertaken by the Karmapa, and laments the degenerate nature of disciples and teachers in Central Asia during this period.

(ix) *Chos kyi rje 'jigs rten dbang po dpal karma pa brgyad pa'i zhabs kyi mtshan rab tu brjod pa rje nyid kyis mdzad pa*<sup>90</sup> (3 fols) explains the meaning of the Eighth Karmapa's full name. The mentioning of the names

<sup>85</sup> The full title being: *Byang phyogs 'di na karma pa/rim par byon las bdun pa rang byung ni/ /kun mkhyen chos rje'i slob mar gyur 'ga' yi' /bka' 'bangs mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 350–387.

<sup>86</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 3, pp. 519–549.

<sup>87</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 430–438.

<sup>88</sup> This is clearly stated in the beginning of the text. The more elaborate title of the self praise is *Tshigs su bcad pa blza med mar 'bod pa* (ibid. fol 1b: *bdag nyid la gdag nyid kyis bstod pa byas pa'i tshigs su bcad pa blza med mar 'bod pa de nyid kyi tshig don dgrol bar bya/*).

<sup>89</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 488–507.

<sup>90</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 388–392.

is also a benefit of this text: 'Glorious Fame Accomplishing the teaching, Victorious in all Directions at all Times in Manifold [Ways], Unmovable Good One, [and] Melodious Sound of Adamantine (*vajra*) Joy.'<sup>91</sup> The text is an example of the creative and poetic methods by which the author relates each element of the names to various doctrinal concepts and qualities of Buddhism. The text has a commentary by dPa bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba which is described below.

(x) *dPal ldan mi bskyod rdo rje'i gsang ba'i mam thar chu zla'i snang brnyan* 1 fol., is a very short secret spiritual biography not attested in any title lists to date. It was requested by a sGam po mKhan po, who also authored a spiritual biography that has only come to light recently (see the following section (b) no. vi below). It is contained in a highly interesting manuscript collection that my colleague Thrinle Tulku Rinpoche (Paris) had discovered at KIBI, New Delhi (working title hereafter: *Delhi Ms*) and kindly shared with me.<sup>92</sup> The brief verse-like text is found on fol. 5b-6a (pp. 283–284) of the volume with the margin *ga*. The content is mostly about visions, dreams, and spiritual experiences. A more elaborate description of this corpus will be found in my forthcoming work about Mi bskyod rdo rje's writings.

### (b) *Spiritual Biographies by Direct Students of the Eighth Karmapa*

The first three texts (i–iii) are the earliest, most extensive, and historically significant primary sources for the study of the Karmapa's life. Additionally, the spiritual biography composed by Sangs rgyas dpal grub (ii) contains a hint about two important sources unfortunately still missing. Accurate historical research has to be based on these three accounts, combined with the spiritual memoirs presented earlier.

(i) *rGyal ba kun gyu dbang po dpal ldan karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i zhabs kyi dgung lo bdun phan gyi rnam par thar pa nor bu'i phreng ba*, (37 fols) by dGe slong Byang chub bzang po alias A khu a khra, contains the most detailed account of the Karmapa's early years. Its author, Byang chub bzang po (more famously known as A khu a khra), was an attendant of the Eighth Karmapa. He met the then seven-month-old Karmapa in 1508,

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. fol. 1b (p. 389): *dpal ldan chos grub grags pa phyogs thams cad la dus kun tu sna tshogs par rnam par rgyal ba mi bskyod bzang po rdo rje dga' ba'i dbyang*. In the English translation, the beginning of a discernible subname is capitalised for easier comprehension, though the subnames can be determined in various ways (ibid. fol. 2b/p. 391).

<sup>92</sup> I would like to thank Thrinle Rinpoche for his help.

attending him until shortly before completion of his eighth year (1514).<sup>93</sup> He indicates in the colophon that he was a student of the Seventh Karmapa, Chos grags rgya mtsho. He was likely an administrator under the Seventh Karmapa<sup>94</sup>, and compiled a collection of meditation instructions of the *Ras chung snyan rgyud*.<sup>95</sup> The colophon further mentions that he noted several miraculous events, which he witnessed and affirms the authenticity of the events depicted.

Since an attendant of the Karmapa authored this spiritual biography, one can assume its author was close to him. Further, it is clear that the Karmapa himself was familiar with, or at least aware of, this source: in a spiritual memoir the Eighth Karmapa composed in his fortieth year (1546), he writes: 'The spiritual biography up to [my] seventh year, arranged by the monk (*dge slong*) Byang chub bzang po.'<sup>96</sup>

This work became the primary source on the Karmapa's early years for later biographers. dPa' bo rin po che, too young to witness the events, remarks that he had summarised A khu a khra's work for depicting the Karmapa's early years in his own work (see below).<sup>97</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, author of the next source, also mentions that he used A khu a khra's account. At times Sangs rgyas dpal grub and dPa' bo rin po che added different perspectives to the events. A more detailed analysis of A khu a khra's work can be found in Chapter Five, where four teaching dialogues embedded within the text will be examined.

<sup>93</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 36b (p. 104): *zhes pa 'di ni dge slong byang chub bzang po bya ba ming gzhan a khu a khra grags pa/ yang dag pa'i rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas karma pa chos grags rgya mtsho las bka' drin cung zad mnos pa'i rten 'brel gyis/ sprul pa'i sku 'di yang dgung zla bdun bzhes nas mjal/ dgung lo bgryad du ma longs kyi bar zhabs pad bsten nas ngo mtshar gyi mdzad pa kha shas mthong ba kun zin bris byas par 'dug/*. While this colophon talks about 'until [his] eighth year was not reached', the title used the wording 'up to the seventh year' (*dgung lo bdun pa*) of the Karmapa (being 1513/14).

<sup>94</sup> dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba called him *dpon chen* of the Seventh Karmapa, literally meaning 'great lord' but here probably indicating 'great administrator' (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1225).

<sup>95</sup> The work he compiled is Byang chub bzang po, A khu a khra, *bDe mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud*.

<sup>96</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 5a (p. 358): *dge slong byang chub bzang pos dgung lo bdun yan gyi mam thar bsgrigs pa/*.

<sup>97</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1225: *de ltar gzhon nu rol rtsed kyi nram thar cung zad tsam dge slong byang chub bzang po zhes bya ba drung gong ma'i dpon chen a khu a khra zhes grags pa des bsgrigs pa'i nram thar las bsdu pa yin la 'di pyin gyi mdzad pa sa bon tsam nyid la nyid kyis bstod pa dang sbyar te brjo par bya'ol/*.

(ii) *rGyal ba spyan ras gzigs dbang brgyad pa' nram thar legs spyad ma'i don 'grel gsal ba'i sgron me* (90 fols), by Sangs rgyas dpal grub, is an extensive spiritual biography by a student of the Eighth Karmapa, containing lengthy doctrinal discussions. The text is designed as 'commentary' on the Karmapa's spiritual memoir (i), listed above (*Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar legs spyad mar grags pa rje nyid kyis mdzad pa*).<sup>98</sup> According to the colophon, the author attended the Karmapa from his thirty-third year on (1539).<sup>99</sup> Thus, the text was composed some time proceeding that year. Sangs rgyas dpal grub was appointed by the Eighth Karmapa as a lama somewhere in gTsang and is also found requesting a brief Great Seal commentary.<sup>100</sup>

The outline shows that this spiritual biography is designed as a pedagogical tool. In the statement of purpose, Sangs rgyas dpal grub explains that the work seeks to inspire faith in students and in those who 'have the eye of wisdom', so that when seeing or hearing this spiritual biography they would want to learn and emulate it.<sup>101</sup> To that end, events in the Karmapa's life are subsumed under topics such as the deeds of the bodhisattva (e.g. the six *pāramitās*), and are consequently not ordered chronologically. Often the reflective remarks are inserted about the bad times and boastful teachers around 'these days' (*deng sang*).<sup>102</sup> However, on the closing pages where the author details his sources, some interesting information is offered. Again, mention is found of A khu a khra's account of the Eighth Karmapa's early years, but the author then mentions two more texts, presently unavailable: a spiritual biography composed by Grub pa'i dbang phyug sGam po Khan po Śākya dge slong bzang po, and one authored by Bla ma dPon yig.<sup>103</sup> The *nram thar* authored by a sGam po Khan po Śākya dge slong bzang po has recently surfaced and is briefly described below (no. vi).

<sup>98</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 90b/p. 329: *karma pa brgyad pa legs spyad ma'i grel pa*.

<sup>99</sup> This date is confirmed by *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 341.

<sup>100</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 346. He requested the notes (*zin bris*) of the Eighth Karmapa's *rGya gar gyi phyag chen ngon byung dwags brgyud kyi sgros kyis rgyan pa*.

<sup>101</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 3b (p. 155).

<sup>102</sup> For example Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 22a, p. 192.

<sup>103</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 83b (p. 315): *zhes a khu a kras pa bsgrigs pa'i nram thar dang grub pa'i dbang phyug sgam po khan po śākya dge slong bzang pos mdzad pa'i nram thar dang bla ma dpon yig gis mdzad pa'i nram thar dang drung nyid gsungs pa'i nram thar yin pa nams nang nas khungs dag re re*.

Some passages<sup>104</sup> are more extensive than in dPa' bo's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, though they use similar wording. The intertextuality might suggest that Sangs rgyas dpal grub's work is older, or alternatively that here we find remnants of the two missing sources, that may have partly served as templates for other early texts. This quality makes this source very valuable. Yet the full extent of the relationship will remain unclear until the two missing accounts are located and the spiritual biographies can be analysed together in greater detail.

(iii) *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (vol. 2, pp. 1206–1334) by dPa' bo gTsong lag 'phreng ba (1504–1566) contains the longest account about Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje. The passage on the Karmapa is contained in the block-print volume *pa* of this 'history of Buddhism' (*chos 'byung*) which follows a narration strategy similar to that of a spiritual biography. Across various published editions there are no differences in content, with dissimilarities being limited merely to orthography.

The whole of the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, was composed between 1545 and 1565. The spiritual biography of the Eighth Karmapa is found in Chapter Three: the religious history of the Karma bKa' brgyud school. In his colophon, dPa' bo rin po che explains that he was urged by mKhas grub dPal Kir ti śwa ra (Skt. Kīrtiśvara) to compose a spiritual biography and had promised to do so twelve years before. He then completed the spiritual biography of the Eighth Karmapa in a bird year (probably 1561) at the dGa' ldan Ma mo temple in Kong po.<sup>105</sup> gTsong lag 'phreng ba was one of the Karmapa's two principle disciples, and as such his testimony can be regarded as trustworthy, insofar as the genre can be viewed as such.

Looking at the intertextuality of this work and the other major spiritual biographies composed by the Eighth Karmapa's students, it seems that dPa' bo Rin po che took them into account in creating this work; though the other texts can, at times, be more extensive. Nevertheless, of single works treating the whole of the Karmapa's life, dPa' bo's account may be considered the most extensive to date. While sometimes following a chronological order of events, it is divided into different topics such as his youth, his receiving the various levels of vows of Buddhism, his ascetic practices, and his benefiting of others—a structure which again elevates the religious function of the text over the historical.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, the passage describing how the Eighth Karmapa studied with Karma 'phrin las pa (Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 23b f./p. 196).

<sup>105</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* p. 1333–1334.



(iv) *Chos kyi rje 'jigs rten dbang po dpal karma pa brgyad pa'i zhabs kyi mtshan rab tu brjod pa'i 'grel pa*<sup>106</sup> (19 fols) is a commentary by gTsong lag 'phreng ba on the spiritual memoir about the different names of the Eighth Karmapa (a.ix).

(v) *Mi bskyod rdo rje rnam thar tshig bcad ma* (5 fols) and (vi) *rGyal ba mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bstod pa zol med mes pa 'dren byed* (26 fols) are found in the *Selected Writings* (vol. II) of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, another prominent student of the Eighth Karmapa. These are two verse-accounts in which the Zhwa dmar pa praises the deeds of his teacher. They are not extensive, yet constitute an early source on the Eighth Karmapa's life, but without substantial new historical information.

(vi) The secret biography by Khan po Śākya dge slong bzang po has no title and is contained in the recently obtained manuscript collection *Delhi Ms*, fol. 5b–10b (pp. 284–294), margin *ga*.<sup>107</sup> This secret spiritual biography is basically a compilation of various events, mostly in the form of sayings of the Eighth Karmapa, that do not follow a recognisable order. The colophon mentions the compiler sGam po mKhan po Śākya bzang po. It further suggests it is a secret spiritual biography and affirms the nature of representing authentic sayings (*gsung*) of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>108</sup> As such, this interesting text might as well be considered a 'compiled autohagiography' and warrants further study.

### (c) *Spiritual Biographies by Later Tibetan Scholars*

(i) *Kaṃ tshang* contains the most extensive spiritual biography among the numerous later compilations. It is part of the great history of the bKa' brgyud tradition by Si tu Paṇ chen and 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab. The account of the Eighth Karmapa is twenty-five folios long<sup>109</sup> and mainly consists of a summary of dPa' bo gTsong lag 'phreng ba's and other earlier

<sup>106</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 393–430, 19 fols.

<sup>107</sup> The incipit of this text is: *om bde legs su gyur cig/ ri rab rdul gyis grangs kyiis nmal byor ma*. For the circumstances of this text's discovery, see above.

<sup>108</sup> *Delhi Ms*, fol. 10b (p 294): *rje thams cad mkyan pa 'di nyid rnam par thar pa zab cing rgya che ba/ bsam kyi mi khyab pa/ gsang ba bas kyang ches bsang ba 'di nyid/ rje'i gsung las phri bsnan med par sgam po mkhan po shākya bzang pos mkod pa*. 'This omniscient lord himself's very liberation story, profound and vast, inconceivable, and more secret than secret, arranged by sGam po mKhan po Śākya bzang po without subtracting or adding ...'

<sup>109</sup> This refers to the edition published in 1972; in this thesis a reprint from 2004 will be used. The editions differ only in minuscule orthographical variations.

works.<sup>110</sup> *Kaṃ tshang* was completed in 1715, one hundred and sixty-one years after the Eighth Karmapa's death. Nevertheless, at times passages elucidate the cryptic parts of the older sources as events are ordered in a more intelligible and predominantly chronological way. Further, some passages suggest that Si tu Paṇ chen might have had access to the two now unavailable sources.

The other, later compilations listed are often based on the *Kaṃ tshang* of Si tu Paṇ chen, which has become—according to mKhan po Nges don—the standard source for scholars in the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage. One main reason may be that this particular version poses less of a challenge to the reader and is organised more chronologically.<sup>111</sup>

(ii) *Chos rje karma pa sku 'phreng rim byon gyi nram thar mdor bsdu dpag bsam khri shing* by Karma nges don bstan rgyas (nineteenth century) is a compilation of Karmapa biographies from the First to the Fifteenth, written in 1891. It provides a section on the Eighth Karmapa over forty-one pages, consisting of a summary of Si tu Paṇ chen's *Kaṃ tshang*.

(iii) The short account regarding the Eighth Karmapa in the *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 7, pp. 163–184) compiled by mKhas btsun bzang po in 1973, amounts to a review of *Kaṃ tshang* and, as such, adds nothing new. Brief accounts and summaries based on the aforementioned texts can be found in various modern bibliographies of Tibetan scholars, though they are of no independent value.<sup>112</sup>

In summary, the most useful primary sources for depicting the life of the Karmapa are the three spiritual biographies by his students (i–iii) and some spiritual memoirs (mainly ii, iii, and v). It has also been shown that two of the five early sources by his students are still missing.<sup>113</sup> Of the later compilations, the extensive and well-structured *Kaṃ tshang* by Si tu Paṇ chen can be very useful, as it seems to contain remnants of the two lost sources.

<sup>110</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* is sometimes referred to in the text. Concerning the other sources, we can only speculate whether Si tu Paṇ chen had access to them or not. I assume that he had.

<sup>111</sup> Oral communication, February 2005.

<sup>112</sup> 1984: Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang (ed.), *Bod gangs can gyi grub mtha' ris med kyi mkhas dbang brgya dang brgyad cu lhag gi gsung 'bum so so'i dkar chag phyogs gcig to sgrigs pa shes bya'i gter mdzod*, pp. 15–17. 1992: Grags pa 'byung gnas and Blo bzang mkhas grub, *Gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, pp. 27–29. 1997: rGyal mtshan, *Kaṃ tshang yab sras dang spal spungs dgon pa*, pp. 52–57. 1997: lDan ma 'Jam dbyangs tshul khri ms, *dPal karma pa sku 'phreng rim byon gyi mdzad nram*, pp. 158–168. 1999: Mi nyag mgon po, *Gangs can mkhas dbang rim byon gyi nram thar mdor bsdu*, pp. 248–251.

<sup>113</sup> *'Bras spungs dkar chag*, p. 1506 lists an alleged autobiography entitled *rNam thar rin chen 'od 'phreng*. This could, however, not be verified in any of the title lists. As the text is also unavailable, its nature remains doubtful.

In the course of this thesis, the usage of spiritual biographies will be twofold: (i) while remaining aware of the importance of the narrative plots and topoi, conclusions will be drawn about historical facts, on the basis of which the Eighth Karmapa's life and context of his Great Seal teachings can be reconstructed. (ii) In Chapter Five one of these sources (*A khu A khra*) will be treated as instruction and religious narrative. Here, the methodologies from narratology will be partially employed for dialogues revolving around the Great Seal.

This chapter presented and discussed the sources for the study of the Eighth Karmapa, his Great Seal, and his life. It has attempted to come to terms with the origin and textual history of the Karmapa's writings, identifying early title lists which aid the verification of the works ascribed to him. Further, it has shown that a manuscript edition was issued soon after his passing. A survey of missing texts revealed the relevant material to be complete with minor exceptions, and the contribution and origination of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* was investigated and its rubrics outlined. A discussion of genres documenting or consisting of Great Seal teaching concluded that meditation instructions, esoteric precepts, advices, and question and answer texts are key genres for Great Seal teaching in general. In closing, the issues arising when employing spiritual biographies and memoirs as sources and their usage in this thesis was expounded upon, the available writings analysed and the most valuable spiritual biographies and memoirs selected.

## Chapter 4

### The Eighth Karmapa: Scholar, Monk, and Yogi

Apart from [teaching a few suitable individuals], for [those] not striving for the authentic dharma [but] wishing to obtain the dharma of material [wealth] and fame, [I] pleased [this] mass of thoughtless individuals through the idle chatter of fake (*ltar bcos*) empowerment, reading transmission, and meditation instruction (*dbang lung khrid*).<sup>1</sup>

– From a spiritual memoir of the Eighth Karmapa

The boy who would become the Eighth Karmapa did not have an easy childhood: his status as incarnation was disputed and, while his school enjoyed special favours, unrest in dBus set in again after 1517. Yet, he became one of the most important scholars of the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition and a renowned meditation teacher, who exerted political influence in places where his school held large estates. This chapter provides a portrait of his life and spiritual programme, thus laying the foundation for understanding the Eighth Karmapa and his Great Seal in context.

#### 4.1 The Eighth Karmapa's Life

In this summary, crucial events are presented chronologically, with attention paid to historical perspective as far as the sources allow.<sup>2</sup> Issues pertinent to this thesis are analysed more extensively. These are the

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<sup>1</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 6b (p.341): *gzhan du dam chos don du mi gnyer zhing/ /zang zing grags pa'i chos thob 'dod rnams ngor/ /dbang lung khrid ltar bcos pa'i ngag kyal gyis/ bsam med skye bo'i tshogs rnams mgu bar byas/*.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Three (3.3, 3.4), for how the sources are used. For a detailed account of the early years of Mi bskyod rdo rje with an emphasis on the dispute about the incarnation, see also Jim Rheingans 'Narratives of Reincarnation, Politics of Power, and the Emergence of a Scholar: the Very Early Years of Mi bskyod rdo rje and its Sources', in *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined: Biography in the Buddhist Traditions*, edited by Linda Covill, Ulrike Roesler, and Sarah Shaw (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), 241–299.

formative years of the Eighth Karmapa's evolution into a scholar and mystic teacher: his childhood and the dispute about the incarnation; his education; his practice of the Great Seal and some scholastic contributions and political involvements. The later part of the Karmapa's religious career is treated in abbreviated manner.

#### 4.1.1 Birth and Early Childhood (1507–1508)

Most narratives initially outline various pre-birth events and establish the Eighth Karmapa's continuity with his predecessor, the Seventh Karmapa Chos grags rgya mtsho through a quote attributed to him: 'I am unborn and yet show birth, I *do not abide* and yet show abiding, there is no death and yet I show dying; and again, though there is no birth, I show [re]birth.'<sup>3</sup> The infant who would later become Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje was born on the fourth day of the eleventh month of the fire hare year (1507) in Eastern Tibet in today's Chab mdo prefecture, close to the Ngom chu river.<sup>4</sup> The area was called Kar ti phug in a village called Sa tam. To the north laid the main Karma bKa' brgyud seat in Eastern Tibet, Karma dgon. To the south-west, the sTag lung bKa' brgyud seat Ri bo che.<sup>5</sup> The future Karmapa's

<sup>3</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 5a/p. 41: *bdag ni skye ba med la skye tshul ston/ /gnas pa med la gnas tshul ston/ /'chi ba med la 'chi ba'i tshul ston/ /slar yang skye ba med la skye tshul bstan/*). *A khu A khra*, fol. 1b ff. (p. 2ff.), starts out by outlining the Karmapa's former incarnations as great masters of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (pp. 32–42) after he had brought forth *bodhicitta* in the presence of the Buddha rGyal ba seng ge na ro. Before the narration of the actual birth, most narratives expound on the qualities of the Karmapa's parents. For the prebirth stories and the nature of the parents see *A khu A khra*, fol. 2a–5b (pp. 4–10); Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 1a–7a (2–14); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1206–1209 and *Kam tshang*, p. 299–302. The latter *Kam tshang* has been translated in excellent manner into German by Verhufen (1995: 75–79).

<sup>4</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 9b (p. 50) simply states 'eleventh month' (*zla ba bcu gcig pa*). *Kam tshang*, p. 302, has the fourth day of the eleventh *hor* month as the Karmapa's birthday. If one were to transpose this information, it is likely the seventh of December 1507. We can assume – with good reason – that these dates are given according to the mTshur phu astrological tradition used by scholars of the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition, where the eleventh *hor* month is the first (lunar) winter month; in this cycle it would also hold true for the Phug pa calculation (see Schuh 1973 and Vogel 1964: 225–226, for the Tibetan calendar and the sexagenary cycle; see Henning 2007: 337–339, for the Kālacakra and the mTshur phu tradition). According to Schuh's calculation (1973: 123 of the table), the Kālacakra *byed rtsis* (which, to some extent forms the basis of the mTshur phu calculations), the eleventh month start with the 4.12.1507 of our calendar, which makes the fourth day of this month the 7.12.1507.

<sup>5</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 300; Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 1b (p. 351). For the area, see also Dorje (1999: 395–397).

father was gSer Bya bral Byams pa bshes gnyen, occasionally abbreviated 'A Byams pa'; his mother was Bla ma sgron, a wife from the lDong clan, also called 'dBon mo Bla ma sgron'.<sup>6</sup>

Following the style of spiritual biographies, immediately after his birth the Karmapa is said to have rolled his eyes back and to have uttered 'I am the Karmapa'.<sup>7</sup> When news spread of the birth of a special boy, the Karma Si tu pa, whose main seat was Karma dgon, decided to examine the case after just seven days.<sup>8</sup> The Seventh Karmapa had apparently left letters regarding his rebirth for the rGyal tshab Rin po che and Si tu Rin po che respectively.<sup>9</sup> In Si tu pa's prediction letter, the future Karmapa's parents were named 'Byams pa' and 'Bla ma mtsho'. However, these did not accord precisely with those of the boy's parents (A byams pa/Byams pa bshes gnyen, Bla ma sgron). Therefore, Si tu pa decided to test the matter.<sup>10</sup>

First, Si tu pa told the parents to keep the special nature of the boy secret for three months and gave them various presents for the boy, including a silk scarf and ritual pills (*rten 'dus ril bu*). He said to the infant Karmapa: 'I will bring you clothes and invite you for tea [later].'<sup>11</sup> He then instructed them to serve the pills and burn incense. Upon doing so, if the boy would be the incarnation, nothing would happen. If not, he would show signs the

<sup>6</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 5b (p. 42). According to his spiritual memoir (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 1b/p. 251) the father was gSer Bya bral Byams pa bshes gnyen and the mother is called Bla ma sgron, identified with an attendant of Birwapa, when he was invited by the Chinese emperor. The father had apparently received Great Seal teachings from the Seventh Karmapa and descended from the patrilineage (*gdungs*) of the nine generals of the time of the Sa skya hierarch 'Gro dgon 'phags pa (1235–1280) (ibid. fol. 1b/p.251). As the boy is sometimes (ibid. fol. 13a /p. 57) called "Son of lDag li" (*ldag li'i bu*) or "Father and Son Lho rong Nang so pa" (*lho rong nang so yab sras*), these two names of the Karmapa's father may be added.

<sup>7</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 9b (p. 50), mentions that he has uttered this phrase three times, whereas *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (p. 1212) wrote he said it twice. According to his spiritual memoir the Karmapa said: 'om ma ñi pad me hum', 'Karmapa, Karmapa' and 'a, ā, i, ī' (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 1b/p. 351).

<sup>8</sup> There seems to be some confusion about the dates of the Si tu pa: Richardson (1980: 377) gives the dates of Si tu II bKra shis mam rgyal (1450–1497) and Si tu III bKra shis dpal 'byor (1498–1541). But *A khu A khra*, fol. 18b (p. 68), and Zhang Yisun assert that the Karma Si tu pa passed away in 1512. Furthermore, c.1516, the Eighth Karmapa recognised the incarnation of Si tu bKra shis dpal 'byor and gave him the name Chos kyi 'od zer (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1234). It would follow that the Si tu at hand here is the third Si tu bKra shis dpal 'byor. That means he would have had to die in 1512 and been reborn before 1516.

<sup>9</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1207.

<sup>10</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 10a (p. 51).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. fol. 10a (p. 51): *'karma si tu bas khyod la na bza' ja 'dren dang bcas pa bskur yod zhus la/*.

next day. If he were to say verses in the evening, it would be maximum four phrases (*tshig*) and minimum three; then the parents should come to him. The father did accordingly and said: 'If you are the rebirth of the Karmapa, Karma Si tu pa will bring you clothes and invite you for tea; therefore clothes and tea invitation are marginal and can be left for later!' The boy replied: 'E ma ho! Do not harbour doubts about me; I am [the one] called the Karmapa.'<sup>12</sup>

At three months old, the boy was invited by the masters of Ri bo che, Ri bo che Chos rje and the Lho rong sDe pa (the ruler of Lho rong, sometimes called Lho rong Go shri) to Lho rong.<sup>13</sup> At the age of seven months, it is recounted that he gave blessings to a large assembly near Ri bo che.<sup>14</sup>

Around 1508, the mTshur phu rGyal tshab bKra shis rnam rgyal (1490–1518) (rGyal tshab Rin po che) received news about the signs of the rebirth of the Karmapa, in the area of the Ngom river from a Bla ma bSod nams rgyal mtshan, in conjunction with the rising sun shining on his tent and his first tea. This was considered auspicious by the rGyal tshab Rin po che.<sup>15</sup> However, he also received news about another possible candidate: a boy staying in Kong po.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. fol. 10a–b (p. 51–52): *khyed karma pa'i sku skye yin na/ karma si tu bas khyed la na bza' ja 'dren dang bcas pa bskur byas pas/ na* [fol. 10b] *bza' ja 'dren yang zur 'phyis gsung nas/ e ma ho/ nga la the tshom ma byed dang/ nga ni karma pa zhes bya/ zhes gsungs/*. The translation for *zur 'phyis* is free, as a spelling error is suspected. The meaning used was supported by mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, March 2007). Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 8a (p. 164), adds that the event took place nine days after the birth on the thirteenth day of the month. Later tradition considered the whole event important; Thinley (1980: 89) reports comparatively extensively on it (one assumes he used the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* for this passage). Following this, the spiritual biographies relate events in support of the boy being the re-embodiment of the Seventh Karmapa, such as recognising students and ritual implements from his past life and showing signs of remarkable spiritual abilities (*A khu A khra*, fol. 17b/p. 66).

<sup>13</sup> It is not entirely clear from the sources whether he actually went to the places of Ri bo che and Lho rong respectively, or whether these two persons invited him while being in another place. Ri bo che, however, is quite close to the area of his birth: the temple of Ri bo che was founded in 1246 by Sangs rgyas 'on, third lineage holder and abbot of the sTag lung branch of the bKa' bryud school (Dorje 1999: 391). The area, and the town of Lho rong, is south-east of the Karmapa's birth place in Ngom, and further south than Ri bo che (ibid. 403).

<sup>14</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 12b (p. 56).

<sup>15</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 13a (p. 57); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1215. In Tibetan culture, the interpretation of events as auspicious or inauspicious (*rten 'brel*) is a widely accepted practice rooted in pre-Buddhist beliefs (Samuel 1993: 176; Tucci 1980: 202; for the role of dreams, see Wayman 1967). In the spiritual biographies, the interpretation of dreams and various kinds of divination play key roles in identifying the Karmapa. Verhufen (1995: 50) points out the importance of visions as transmission in the Eighth Karmapa's spiritual biography.

### 4.1.2 The Dispute about the Incarnation (1508–1513)

The story which unfolds from the proclamation of the rival candidate illustrates some of the religio-political concerns in determining an incarnation, and was likely a decisive factor in the Eighth Karmapa's development.<sup>16</sup> The boy proclaimed Karmapa-candidate was the son of a Bla ma A mdo ba, residing in Kong po Brags gsum (south-west of Lhasa). At this time, the Karma encampment (*sgar*), the movable tent village of the previous Karmapa, was probably pitched in the area of Kong po.<sup>17</sup> dPa' bo rin po che recounts that as the Bla ma A mdo ba had offered those residing in the encampment food and beer (*chang*), they became partial towards the view that his son was the Karmapa.<sup>18</sup>

The rGyal tshab Rin po che quickly went to Kong po Brag gsum, having had dreams of the worldly behaviour of the residents in his encampment, and met the other candidate. When the candidate returned all three gifts to him, the rGyal tshab Rin po che considered this a bad omen. In a dream afterwards, he saw the west as black and east (the Karmapa's birth place) as bright.<sup>19</sup>

While the matter seemed clear to the rGyal tshab Rin po che, the path to the resolution of this matter and the enthronement of the Eighth Karmapa would be a long one. Sources indicate the rival candidate's party had the political support of the Phag mo gru pa regents (such as Ngag dbang bKra

<sup>16</sup> Verhufen (1995: 80) did not present this dispute in detail as he based himself on the highly abbreviated version in *Kam tshang*, pp. 304–305. Verhufen (1995: 96, n. 59) has noted, however, two brief sentences in Stein (1972: 147, he had employed the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* as source) who indicate the conflicting situation.

<sup>17</sup> From the time of the Seventh Karmapa, Chos grags rgya mtsho, the encampment became more permanent and was occasionally called mTshur phu sgar. The camp moved periodically in a nomadic way (oral communication mKhan po Nges don; Thinley 1980: 90; Jackson, D. 1996: 167). The Tibetan *sgar pa* can also refer to the inhabitants of the encampment, consisting of monks and lamas, as well as lay-people acting as guards for the religious hierarchs (Snellgrove and Richardson 1968: 137).

<sup>18</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1216. dPa' bo's account of the two incarnations is, in general, more bitter in this matter. He says, for example, that Bla ma A mdo ba was wild.

<sup>19</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 13bf. (p. 58f.); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1216. Previously, while in a retreat in sNye bo sa phug, the rGyal tshab Rin po che had dreamt of a similar scenario: at the right side of a tiger there was a lion who could not roar and the tiger was also unable to roar. While contemplating the nature of the voice of the tiger if the lord of all wild animals, the lion, has no voice, from the left a dragon's roar pervaded all directions. After the roar sounded, the lion became a white dog and vanished. When, later that day he examined the dream, he concluded that the tiger was him, the lion the western incarnation and the dragon the eastern. He related this to Bla ma gCod pa from Rong po (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1216; *A khu A khra*, fol. 14a/p. 59).



shis grags pa, 1488–1564) and their priests (*yon mchod*), the rGyal tshab Rin po che and mTshur pu monks, and what is more, the powerful Rin spungs pa general, Don yod rdo rje. Thus, the most powerful and wealthy patrons along with the encampment lamas and monks had become partial to the western candidate.<sup>20</sup> As the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa had relations with both the conflicting Phag mo gru and Rin spungs pa parties<sup>21</sup>, it is important to briefly survey his role in the process of determining the Karmapa.

A passage in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* indicates the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, when asked whether he would invite the boy from Kong po brag gsum for tea, declined and mentioned to those in the encampment that the incarnation from the east would be undisputed.<sup>22</sup> Still, it appears he assumed a relatively low-key role in the recognition process: he had not met the young Karmapa, and consequently did not act as his principal tutor. This is surprising, as the Zhwa dmar pa had been the main lineage holder after the passing of the Seventh Karmapa, and was a respected spiritual teacher with significant political influence. Yet it might have been precisely this that hindered him in fulfilling his role as the Karmapa's instructor.<sup>23</sup>

Examining how the sources explain this fact, one uncovers the intricate religio-political situation the hierarchs were engulfed in. dPa' bo Rin po che explains: the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa would have been a suitable teacher for the Karmapa, but first he could not go to mDo kham, and later the conditions (*rten 'brel*) of his meeting the Karmapa did not materialise.<sup>24</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub adds that mDo khams and dBus gtsang were separated by a great distance. And it is said the Karmapa received various letters from the Zhwa dmar pa.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 10a (p. 168). Sangs rgyas dpal grub is the only source explicitly mentioning this political support. Interestingly, here the rGyal tshab Rin po che (including the monks from mTshur phu in the sGar) is also depicted as supporting the western candidate. This is likely to mean that, as the main lords of Tibet and all the monks in his camp supported the rival candidate, he had to put on a show.

<sup>21</sup> Ehrhard (2010: 219–221); see also Chapter Two (2.2).

<sup>22</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1219.

<sup>23</sup> A current doctoral research by Kamilla Mojzes 'The Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Incarnate: A Comprehensive Study of the Life and Works of Chos grags ye shes dpal bzang po (1453–1524)' (University of Bonn) will certainly shed more light on the related issues.

<sup>24</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232.

<sup>25</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 13a (p. 194). The *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* contain a song praising the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Mon sha 'ug stag sgo dom tshang ngur mo rong du gsungs pa'i mgur*).

However, usually distances did not matter to Tibetans, not to mention great hierarchs such as the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, who commonly spent their entire lives travelling in Tibet, China, and Mongolia.<sup>26</sup> Thus, one may wish to speculate as to another possibility. The Zhwa dmar pa's (and the Karma bKa' brgyud's) main patron, and most powerful figure in Tibet at the time, Don yod rdo rje, supported the western candidate. Given this fact, it would not have been wise to publicly oppose him. Was it mere coincidence that the Eighth Karmapa was only enthroned in 1513 (see note 28, he arrived in 1513), after Don yod rdo rje passed away?<sup>27</sup>

At some point, the western candidate was invited into the encampment from Kong po brag gsum. The future Karmapa, however, continued travelling to various places in Eastern Tibet, such as Lho rong and Ri bo che, where he inspired the local people and monks and gained their loyal support.<sup>28</sup> Yet, at this point, Sangs rgyas dpal grub evokes an intense image which may be considered a crucial moment in the Eighth Karmapa's life, in spite of the eulogical undertones peculiar to spiritual biographies.<sup>29</sup> The supporters (e.g. the people from Ri bo che and Lho rong) of the future Karmapa were poor, and when he fell ill could not even provide him with medicine. The boy contemplated sadly that in these days having the name of an 'incarnation' (*sprul sku*) would be of no benefit for the next life, and it would also seem that, in this life, there was no control over food or clothing.

He found it unnecessary to have the name of an incarnation and was delighted about not having it. The boy thus resolved that the only thing that mattered was to seek out a qualified teacher and to determine what the true dharma was and what not, feeling joy in contemplating what fortune it

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<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Fourth Zhwa mar pa died in 1524, and thus had seventeen years to travel to mDo khams and meet the young Karmapa. Previously, he had travelled widely and visited his seat in dGa' ldan ma mo in Kong po (Ehrhard 2002a: 15).

<sup>27</sup> The reason behind his inability to come to mDo khams and meet the Karmapa is not entirely clear. A passage in the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa's spiritual biography in *Kaṃ tshang*, pp. 223–224, indicates that the encampment monks apparently did not wish for the Karmapa to go.

<sup>28</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i mam thar*, fol. 2b (p. 333), explains that he stayed (due to the issue of the other candidate) in the area around Lho rong until he was six years old. From the sources it is evident that the Karmapa travelled around and that the other candidate stayed in the camp in Kong po brag gsum when the Karmapa finally arrived in 1513 (see below).

<sup>29</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 10a (p. 168). Although the narratives aim to portray the Karmapa as a Buddha, the difficulties surrounding the incarnation were certainly a historical reality and must have had a considerable impact on the child.

would be to know the Buddhist teachings.<sup>30</sup> The event is rounded off with the narrative of an ascetic, a student of the previous Seventh Karmapa, who performed a divination (*pra phab*) with the aid of Mahākāla. He received a prophecy that all beings would honour and have confidence in this young boy as the Karmapa.<sup>31</sup>

The spiritual biographies portray the future Karmapa's abilities with the often employed topoi of recognising ritual implements such as hats, rosaries, and statues from his predecessors. At the age of nine months (1508) he was invited to the Nam mkha' mdzod temple in Lho rong rDzong gsar.<sup>32</sup> In his third year (1509) he met dBon po dGa' ba and when he was four (1510), on his way to Ri bo che, he encountered Ki nog Bla ma bSod nams rin chen. Ki nog Bla ma offered the Karmapa a turquoise and asked him to reveal himself as Karmapa. The boy is said to have answered with a famous utterance, and regular topos: the equation with other important Buddhist masters: 'Sometimes I am Padmasambhava, sometimes I am Saraha and at other times I am Maitreya.'<sup>33</sup>

Upon his arrival in Ri bo che in 1510, the Karmapa met the local saṅgha and again successfully performed various tests. In sTa shod he related that he would like to go to Kong po, and a letter was prepared for him to go to the encampment. In his fifth year (1511), he proceeded to the area of 'O mo lung where he visited the house of dBon po dGa' ba. Sources subsequently depict a dialogue asserting the Karmapa's superiority over his rival, suggesting clairvoyant abilities. dBon po dGa' ba asked:

'Is the son of A mdo ba the Karmapa?'

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<sup>30</sup> According to mKhan po Nges don, this resolve to seek out the teaching was, among other factors, a decisive one for the Karmapa to become one of the most learned among the Karmapas. mKhan po Nges don further commented that he had seen a text putting forth this position. Unfortunately, the title was not remembered (oral communication, March 2007). It is highly likely that the dispute over the incarnation and its underpinnings had a considerable impact on the young Karmapa.

<sup>31</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 10b (p. 169).

<sup>32</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 14a (p. 59). There he was presented the hat of the Sixth Karmapa and another one, and two statues of the Sixth Karmapa, and in both cases chose the right one.

<sup>33</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 15b (p. 62): *lan re padma 'byung gnas yin/ lan re sa ra ha pa yin/ lan re byams pa dgon po yin* (see also *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1217). This saying is considered 'famous' in that it was reproduced by *Kaṃ tshang* and found entry in all accounts of the Eighth Karmapa's life (Verhufen 1995: 30; Thinley 1980: 90 attributes the date wrongly to 1512; Douglas and White 1976: 86). Visionary meetings with Saraha or connection to him are a mark of all Tibetan Great Seal traditions, including the Second and Third Karmapa's (Schaeffer 2000: 95–98; Braitstein 2004: 64–66) and those of the dGe lugs pa (Willis 1995: 117).

‘I am Karmapa. The son of A mdo ba is a rebirth of the Zur mang incarnation,’ [Karmapa] answered.

[dBon po dGa’ ba asked again:] ‘Is he the one who passed away in rTse Lha khang or the one who passed away in rTsar shis?’

‘He is the one who passed away in rTsar shis; he is my monk.’<sup>34</sup>

In 1512 the Si tu pa passed away at Karma dgon and some of the monks from the encampment came for the funeral rites, thus establishing some contact. After the passing of the Si tu pa, the rGyal tshab Rin po che became the crucial person for establishing the Karmapa’s recognition. In the tenth lunar month of the ape year (1512), the Karmapa was invited to the Karma encampment for the first time. Two messengers (Bla ma Ri pa and bDe bzhi gshegs pa’i dbon po) were sent by rGyal tshab Rin po che from the encampment to rDzong gsar,<sup>35</sup> where the young Karmapa abided.<sup>36</sup> In the twelfth lunar month of the same year the Karmapa traveled via ’O lung monastery, ’Brang ra monastery, Ru shod, and Tshang rag gsum mdo to the direction of the encampment in Kong po.<sup>37</sup>

As the rival candidate was in the encampment at that time, the conflict over the two reincarnations reached its climax. Again, Bla ma Yang ri pa (who had acted as a messenger earlier) came with many offerings to invite the Karmapa for tea.<sup>38</sup>

The inhabitants of the encampment then decided to greet and invite the Lho rong Go shri, who—among others—was travelling with the Karmapa as attendant. However, a rule had been laid down that no one should offer silk scarves, tea invitations or prostrations to the arriving boy, as it was not yet settled whether he was truly the Karmapa. Furthermore, the rival candidate from the west was still present in the encampment. Nevertheless,

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<sup>34</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 17a (p. 65): *karma pa nga yin a mdo bu zur mang sku skye’i skye ba yin/ rtse lha khang la ’das pa de yin nam/ rtsar shis na ’das pa de yin zhus pas rtsar shis na ’das pa yin/ khong nga’i gra pa yin gsungs/*.

<sup>35</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 18b (p. 68). This is Lho rong rDzong gsar in Lho rong and probably not the monastery rDzong gsar which is further in the East (Dorje 1999, p. 465). *A khu A khra* first mentions only the word rDzong, later it is said he would be in rDzong gsar; the area however is the one of Lho rong.

<sup>36</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 18b (p. 68). The rGyal tshab had given his messengers two envelopes (or covers) with similar appearance. One contained words of truth (*bden thob*) and the other one was empty. As the young Karmapa, upon arrival of the messengers, chose the one with the words of truth, the messengers developed strong trust.

<sup>37</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 18b (p. 68).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 19a (p. 69).

the spiritual biographies report that most people, on seeing the boy from the east arriving, were overwhelmed by his charismatic presence and started to prostrate and venerate him, some with tears in their eyes.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the Karmapa was received in the encampment on the New Year day of the bird year (1513). Before the sunset, he met the rGyal tshab Rin po che, bKra shis don grub rnam rgyal, for the first time.<sup>40</sup>

While the future Karmapa had arrived, it would still be more than a month before his enthronement. In the first days, both boys were brought in front of a large assembly where they were asked to answer questions and give blessings. On this occasion, two sources depict the Karmapa as fearless and compassionate in all circumstances, whereas the second candidate, A mdo ba's son, is portrayed as crying and confused.<sup>41</sup>

The source mentions that at this point the inhabitants of the encampment had been split into two parties, each supporting one candidate. The rGyal tshab Rin po che tried to reconcile the parties and urged them not to become partial but to be upright and to trust in the analysis (*dpyod pa*) and careful examination of the candidates. Upon analysis it was revealed that the second candidate—though already seven years old—did not know more words than 'father, mother, and food and drink'.<sup>42</sup>

The rGyal tshab's efforts did not bear results at first. On one occasion the future Karmapa (the eastern boy) was even stopped from stepping on the throne.<sup>43</sup> While public identifications continued, the boys were brought again into a row to identify statues and scroll paintings of former Karmapas. At the first occasion, on the twenty ninth day of the first lunar month, the rival candidate is reported to have failed. The second time, on the first day of the second lunar month, he managed to recognise a painting with the seal of a previous Karmapa. His supporters immediately proclaimed he had been recognised, which the other party doubted.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. fol. 19b (p. 70).

<sup>40</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 19b (p. 70); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1221f.; Sangs rgyas dpal grub fol. 10b (p. 169).

<sup>41</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 11b (p. 171); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1223. One should note that these two sources are written in retrospect. *A khu A khra*, whose author should have witnessed these events, fails to go into detail regarding the other candidate's abilities.

<sup>42</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 11b (p. 171); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1223.

<sup>43</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 20a (p. 71); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 122.

<sup>44</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 21a (p. 73). An interlinear remark (*mchan*) in *ibid.* fol. 21a–b (p. 73–74), expresses scepticism about the 'public recognitions' 'these days' (it is not clear from which time this interlinear remark stems): to examine an incarnation in such a manner and then carry out the recognition would not be suitable for high incarnations such as the Karmapa.

So heated was the atmosphere that the rGyal tshab Rin po che seems to have pondered a possible outbreak of violence. Though he had no doubts as to the identity of the Karmapa, the party supporting the other candidate was politically strong and had powerful allies. On the other hand, the people from Lho rong and rGya ston were fervent adherents of the boy the rGyal tshab had chosen. As no concurrence could be reached, the rGyal tshab suggested to the religious and political heads of the powerful provinces of Lho rong and rGya ston that they might remove the Karmapa from the camp.<sup>45</sup>

The inhabitants of these areas and their leaders considered this unacceptable, as the Karmapa had been decided as far as they were concerned, and threatened to drive out the other candidate and his party if they would not agree on the rightful Karmapa. Tensions mounted and the rGyal tshab worried that, if he did not enthrone the eastern boy and future Karmapa, some of his supporters might be tempted to start a war.<sup>46</sup> Finally, adherents of the second candidate made concessions and informed the rGyal tshab they would concur.<sup>47</sup>

As is typical of spiritual biographies, a dream of the rGyal tshab Rin po che is described as giving guidance.<sup>48</sup> On the thirtieth day of the first lunar month, he dreamt that the Karmapa himself (the eastern candidate) urged the rGyal tshab Rin po che to end the dispute which was underlined by the symbolic appearance of a white and a red *dākinī*. They incited him to let the truth be known and staunch the spread of lies. The rGyal tshab Rin po che, probably under enormous political and spiritual pressure to take a public decision, resolved to enthrone the eastern candidate and confer upon him the title of Karmapa.<sup>49</sup>

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Since, in fact, one would go to ask the common mob. Therefore, a master would not make effort in such recognition apart from to catch the minds of ordinary people.

<sup>45</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 11b (p. 171).

<sup>46</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1223; Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 12a (p. 172).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Specific reasons are not given, though it must be noted that Don yod rdo rje had just passed away in 1512 (see above).

<sup>48</sup> Wayman (1967: 2) explains dreams as literary themes in India and Tibet; he also discusses the dream (*ibid.* 11) as a means developed in the Buddhist tantras.

<sup>49</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 21b (p. 74). The whole incident was pictured in a slightly mistaken manner in previous accounts. Thinley (1980: 90): 'but when he [the rGyal tshab] met Mikyo Dorje, he spontaneously felt compelled to bow down to him.' Douglas and White (1976: 73–74): 'Gyaltsap Tulku Tashi Namgyal and Lama Yang Ripa travelled to Ri Wo Che in order to settle the matter, and vowed not to show any distinction between the two little boys until it was determined beyond doubt which of them was the true incarnation. However when they were presented before Mikyo Dorje they found themselves automatically doing full

Narratives subsequently establish the Karmapa's authority and his continuity with his predecessor, the Seventh Karmapa Chos grags rGyal mtsho, through the ritual of enthronement. In the morning light of the eleventh day of the second lunar month of the bird year (1513), the boy from the East ascended the throne of his predecessor. He received the black hat, symbol of the Karmapas, and the title 'Victorious Great Karmapa' (*rgyal ba karma pa chen po*).<sup>50</sup> The rGyal tshab saw the face of the late Seventh Karmapa in the sun and all in the encampment are reported to have woken up as if from a bad dream to a great trust in the Karmapa, asking themselves: 'What happened to us, that we were deluded before in such a way?'<sup>51</sup> The whole ceremony was a festivity, probably directly witnessed by a saṅgha of over three thousand and celebrated by an even larger number of devotees in the local markets. It is also said that offerings were sent by the Chinese emperor after the Karmapa was recognised.<sup>52</sup>

After the enthronement, on the fifteenth day of the second month of the bird year (1513), the Karmapa uttered praise to *dharmapāla* Mahākāla Ber nag chen and said that it would do away with all harm from non-human beings for the sGar pas.<sup>53</sup> This suggests that they had been under such an influence in the first place. The last doubters in the camp were persuaded by the genuine Karmapa, when he exhibited clairvoyance in knowing that 'official' adherents of the western boy's party secretly already venerated him.<sup>54</sup>

The story of the rival candidate is taken up later in the sources, illustrating the negative result of wrong views (*log lta*). It seems that with the unfavourable turn of events, Bla ma A mdo ba, the candidate's father,

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prostrations to him and thus realized that he must be undoubtedly the real Karmapa.' Verhufen (1995: 96, n. 59) has at least noted that Stein (1972: 147, employing *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*) indicates in two brief sentences the potential conflict of the situation.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. fol. 22a (p. 75); Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 12a (p. 172).

<sup>51</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1224: *sngar nged rang tsho de 'drar 'khrul pa ci byung ngam zhes*.

<sup>52</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 22a (p. 75). In the days thereafter, a series of visions of masters are described (ibid. fol. 22b/p. 76). Verhufen (1995: 49–51) explains the function of such visions as a sign of development of tantric practice and purity of the mental continuum. With special emphasis on the Eighth Karmapa, he has noted that visions take a special place in spiritual biographies. Stott (in Thinley 1980: 3) even deems them the crucial factor of the Karmapa biographies while Nālānda (1980: 313) underlines them as indicators of spiritual transmission.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. fol. 22b (p. 76). The text was entitled *mGon po ma hung mgu ma*, and may refer to a fragment with a slightly different title in the Eighth Karmapa's *Rang la nges pa'i tshad ma* fol. 9b.4–10a (p. 1056–58).

<sup>54</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 22b (p. 76); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1225.

became unhappy and wanted to leave the camp with his son. Though the rGyal tshab Rin po che urged him to stay, he grudgingly departed, which in turn led to a deterioration of his merit due to his wrong views.<sup>55</sup> The narrative relates this to a topos well known in spiritual biographies, finding parallels in the pre-birth stories of the Buddha: the bad times and the hesitation to take rebirth.<sup>56</sup> Its positioning close to the events surrounding the reincarnation may suggest at least a connection. The Karmapa is said to have related to the rGyal tshab Rin po che:

From when I died in the tiger year (*stag lo*, 1506) [as the Seventh Karmapa] until my rebirth in the hare year (*yos lo*, 1507) I stayed in [the pure realm of] dGa' ldan with Maitreya and in [the pure realm] Sukhāvātī and was happy. Then, because I was tired of people,<sup>57</sup> I thought it would be pointless to come here for the time being. When [thinking so] the protector Maitreya and the wisdom-*dākinīs* said, 'you have to take rebirth in the world (*jambudvīpa*).'<sup>58</sup> Having taken rebirth until this year I have stayed in Lho rong.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, in the same year the Karmapa himself urged his followers not to think badly about the other boy.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Early Exposition, Composition, and Travels (1513–1516)

Following this, the Karmapa takes the first steps towards monkhood, and the narrative progresses to depict the deeds expected from a Buddhist meditation master and scholar: exposition (*bshad*), debate (*rtsod*), and composition (*rtsom*). Upon his enthronement in the third month of the bird year (1513), news of the Karmapa spread to all Karma bKa' brgyud monasteries in dBus and gTsang.<sup>60</sup> It seems that at this time people became aware that his name, Mi bskyod rdo rje ('Unshakable Vajra') was given to him by Padmasambhava.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 23a (p. 77).

<sup>56</sup> This idea started out with the concept of the transcendental Buddha as developed in early Mahāyāna by the Mahāsaṅghika-school, such as accounted in the *Mahāvastu* (Scherer 2005: 100).

<sup>57</sup> The phrase *mi rnams la yid chad pas* may also be read as *yid chad yod pas* = 'the people have broken faith'.

<sup>58</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 25b, (p. 82).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 25b, (p. 106).

<sup>60</sup> dPa' bo rin po che himself was witness to it at ten years old (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1224).

<sup>61</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 306. The earlier sources such as *A khu A khra*, *Sangs rgyas dpal grub* and *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* do not mentioned the granting of the name at this stage.



Around this period, the Karmapa started to take Buddhist precepts and received another name, although the accounts vary slightly: According to the *rnam thar* by A khu a khra, on the third day of the fourth lunar month (of the bird year 1513), the Karmapa received from the rGyal tshab Rin po che the eight precepts of the daily fast, the *upavāsatha* vows, and was given the name *Chos skyabs grags pa dpal bzang* ('Dharma-Refuge, Good Radiant Glory').<sup>62</sup> Then a few months later, on the third day of the eighth lunar month (*khnums kyi zla ba*), the rGyal tshab Rin po che performed a hair cutting ceremony in conjunction with inducted him into the 'going forth into homelessness' (*rab byung*, Skt. *pravrajyā*). Often, this term indicates the *śrāmaṇera*-vows of a novice monk.<sup>63</sup> This ritual took place in 'O lung Yang dgon.<sup>64</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* summarises the taking of vows in context of depicting the Karmapa's renunciation on the whole.<sup>65</sup>

After the first giving of his name, the rGyal tshab Rin po che, Mi bskyod rdo rje's first Buddhist teacher, taught him step by step to read and write (*yi ge*). He further passed on the empowerments of Hayagrīva and Vajravārāhī,<sup>66</sup> as well as instructions (*khrid*) of Buddha aspects such as Jinasāgara, Vajrayoginī, and Mahākāla.<sup>67</sup> From his enthronement onwards, the Karmapa began travelling more extensively, journeying to various places in Khams such as bSa' g.yu khang, Ras brag lun, Sho lha sde, and dGa' ldan. In the same bird year (1513), the dialogues analysed in Chapter Five take place: two occur between the first and second teachings of the rGyal tshab, and two follow them.

<sup>62</sup> A khu a khra, fol. 24a (p. 78): *bya lo hor zla bzhi pa'i tshes gsum gyi nyin par gza' spa ba sangs dang skar ma snar ma 'dzom pa la rgyal tshab rin po che'i drung du theg pa chen po'i bsnen gnas kyi sdom pa mnos nas/ mtshan chos skyabs grags pa dpal bzang por gsol. Kaṃ tshang*, p. 307 reads the name variation 'Chos kyi grags pa dpal gzang po' and gives the thirteenth day. The *upavāsatha* vows are the observance of eight precepts during twenty-four hours (Tsomo 2004: 673).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. entry '*pravrajyā*' in Buswell, Robert E., and Donald S. Lopez. *The Princeton dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> A khu a khra, fol. 31b (p. 94). The phrase used is: *gtso bor sems rab tu byung ba'i zhar la khyim pa'i rtags spong ba'i ched du dbu skra bcad cing*. The hair cutting is associated with letting go of the householder's life.

<sup>65</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1226 explains that the Karmapa received the complete Mahāyāna *upāsaka* vows (*sdoms pa*) in conjunction with observing the eight precepts of the *poṣadha* (which is probably his account of the *upavāsatha* vows). He then later took on the signs of the *pravrajyā* together with a hair cutting plus the name and ensuingly the *dge tshul* vows of a novice monk from Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.

<sup>66</sup> A khu a khra, fol. 24a (p. 78).

<sup>67</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 3b (p. 355).

In the ninth month, the Karmapa delivered his first sermon to a large assembly. On the twentieth day he left rDzong gsar<sup>68</sup> for mDo khams and, ultimately, Ri bo che.<sup>69</sup> Local monks and lamas invited him to the ‘offering chamber’ (*mchod khang*), and presented him with tea and other large gifts (in a welcome ceremony). After uttering auspicious prayers he taught the meditation instruction (*zab khrid*) on the *guru yoga* and others to a pleased assembly. Later he is said to have given the reading transmission to the meditation (*sgom lung*) of Avalokiteśvara to more than ten thousand people assembled in a market place.<sup>70</sup> The earliest mentioned text was composed at the age of eight (1514): a commentary to a song (*mgur*) of Mi la ras pa, dealing with the Great Seal.<sup>71</sup>

The Karmapa then returned to Ngom, where he visited the birthplace of the Sixth Karmapa in Ngom shel. In the Re ne dgon seat he appointed dPal ldan bkra shis as abbot.<sup>72</sup> He finally went to the famed Karma monastery, where he was received with great pomp.<sup>73</sup> After briefly meeting two of his most important teachers, he was invited by Sangs rgyas mnyan pa of lDan ma to his monastery, Byang chub gling, where he was greeted by a large gathering.<sup>74</sup> He then journeyed slowly to Li thang and Nyag rong, which at that time was a stronghold of the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa, and finally returned north-eastwards to Zur mang bDe chen rtse.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Probably Lho rong rDzong gsar.

<sup>69</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1330 f. For these travels of the Karmapa, see also *A khu A khra*, fol. 29b (p. 90).

<sup>70</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 34b (p. 100). At that point the source talks about a Zhwa dmar ba. This does not refer, however, to the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa but to some unidentified lama with a red hat.

<sup>71</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun mi las rje sgam po pa pa gdams pa 'mgur 'grel*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1105–1110, 3 fols. Subsequently, further visions are introduced linking the Karmapa to both the epistemological tradition of Dignaga and Dharmakīrti and the epitome of the tantric yogin, Padmasambhava. He replied to a prayer: ‘I am Padmasambhava; you (Karmapa) are rGyal [ba] mchog dbyangs. Inseparable, [we] are the great Vajradhara; [we] rest in the unborn *dharmakāya*.’

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. fol. 35b (p. 102). Visions of Maitreya and Karmapa Pakṣi are reported.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. fol. 36b (p. 103).

<sup>74</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 311. The monastery was founded by Sangs rgyas mnyan pa and is located in the area of lDan ma, in region of sDe dge in Eastern Tibet. It is an area located at the ‘Bri chu river and synonymous with ‘Dan ma and ‘Dan khog (Dorje 1999: 474; Kessler 1983: 56, 65). The following events, in particular the travel to ‘Jang sa tham, are mentioned at a later stage in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, than in *Kaṃ tshang*.

<sup>75</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1231. For notes on the area of Li thang, where the First Karmapa had founded the monastery of Kam po gnas nang, see Dorje (1999: 433). *Kaṃ tshang*, p.

During these early years a patron-priest connection is forged, related by the narratives in typical fashion. The Karmapa accepted an invitation sent by the king of 'Jang Sa tham, an area very much south of Khams in today's south-west China.<sup>76</sup> On the third day of the third month of the mouse year (1516) the Eighth Karmapa arrived in Sa tham, staying for seven days. The event is described as a pompous exchange of gifts, and the young Karmapa passed on teachings to the king, his wives, and the local population. As a result of this link, the king promised not to engage in war with Tibet for thirteen years; he sent five-hundred boys for a monastic education to Tibet each year, and founded a hundred monasteries. The king also provided extensive funding for religious buildings.<sup>77</sup> It shows that through his position, the Karmapa, (likely urged by his retinue) became involved in the politics of the day, indicating the attraction he may have been for local lords.

#### 4.1.4 *Becoming a Scholar and Training the Great Seal (1516–1529)*

The ensuing twelve years were shaping ones for the young Karmapa, characterised by intense study with his main tutors and leading to the composition of the Karmapa's first major scholastic work, a commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.

Four teachers are mentioned as crucial in the spiritual biographies: (i) Sangs rgyas mnyan pa bKra shis dpal 'byor (1445/1457–1510/1525, sometimes called the *mahāsiddha* of gDan ma), (ii) bDud mo ma bKra shis 'od zer (b. 15th century, d. c. 1545), (iii) mKhan chen Chos grub seng ge (b. 15th century), and (iv) Karma 'phrin las pa I Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1456–1539).<sup>78</sup> The Karmapa named them the 'four great masters' (*rje btsun chen po rnam pa bzhi*), for through them he had accomplished the removal of obscuration and the accumulation of good (*bsags sbyang*).<sup>79</sup>

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312, mentions that the Karmapa also visited this monastery on his travel. For the various Zur mang monasteries see Dorje (1999: 484, 486).

<sup>76</sup> This area had been a Karma bKa' brgyud and rNying ma stronghold already during the Yuan period and is in Lithang, in today's province of Szechuan. The First Karmapa had founded Kam po gnas gnang in this area; Karma bKa' brgyud influence was diminished due to the rising dGe lugs influence from 1580 onwards (Dorje 1999: 496).

<sup>77</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 312–313. It is important to note that such numbers are not to be taken literally.

<sup>78</sup> For bKra shis 'od zer's passing away, see *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 345: *rje bkra shis 'od zer 'das pa'i dgongs rzogs bsrubs shing*. This was in 1545 (*sprul lo*).

<sup>79</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bslab pa'i khrid*, fol. 3a (p. 119).

All spiritual biographies, and the Karmapa's writings, indicate that Sangs rgyas mnyan pa was his main guru (Tib. *rtsa ba'i bla ma*), and took the central role of teaching him the Great Seal.<sup>80</sup> Although the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, as stated above, was not a direct teacher, he was apparently involved in selecting Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.<sup>81</sup> The Karmapa had met Sangs rgyas mnyan pa and bDud mo ba bKra shis 'od zer when he was eight years old (1514), reporting he had great confidence in them as his teachers.<sup>82</sup> The actual teacher-student relationship with Sangs rgyas mnyan pa started two years later in the eleventh month of the mouse year (1516) and lasted approximately three years, until the twenty ninth day of the second month of the hare year (1519).<sup>83</sup> During that time he is said to have attended his teacher constantly, suggesting that a close student-teacher relationship was established.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For an account of Sangs rgyas mnyan pa based on *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, see Verhufen (1995: 53–64). Sangs rgyas mnyan pa is invoked in the beginning of almost all the Eighth Karmapa's compositions, and the majority of spiritual biographies composed by the Eighth Karmapa deal with his revered teacher: *Sangs rgyas 'dan ma chen po'i mam thar* (an extensive work with twenty-eight folios), *rGyal ba thams cad mkhyen pa sangs rgyas rin po che*, and the eulogy *rJe mi bskyod rdo rjes dang sangs rgyas mnyan pa grub thob*.

<sup>81</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 20b (p. 189); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232. Zhwa dmar pa told those in the encampment that as the rGyal tshab Rin po che and most of the Seventh Karmapa's students were already dead, the most suitable teacher among the living would be Sangs rgyas mnyan pa. A letter left by the Seventh Karmapa stated that, while there would be many suitable teachers among his direct students, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa was praised as the most suitable. The later *Kam tshang*, p. 314, adds that this letter had been kept by the Si tu Rin po che and that the Karmapa had been saying since he was small that his lama would be Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.

<sup>82</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 20a (p. 188). Because both their names contain the phrase 'bkra shis', they are also sometimes called the 'two bKra shis' (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232: *bkra shis nam gnyis*). Sources also mention that the two teachers had been prophesised to the Karmapa in various visions. See *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232; Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 20b (p. 189); see also Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nam thar*, fol. 3a (p. 334). In *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 3b (p. 355), the Karmapa considers Sangs rgyas mnyan pa to be a rebirth of the siddha Mitrajñāna.

<sup>83</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 14a (p. 176). He attended Sangs rgyas mnyan pa from the eleventh month of this year (*byi lo*) onwards, see *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232. As for the place of meeting, *Kam tshang*, p. 331 has sDe gu dgon and *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232, has Ra ti dGa' ldan gling.

<sup>84</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232; Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21b (p. 191).

### *The Karmapa's Education in General*

Accounts of the Karmapa's education often begin by describing his entering into the three vows.<sup>85</sup> The reception of the *upāsaka* and *śrāmaṇera* vows was accompanied by studies of the related commentaries on monastic discipline.<sup>86</sup> In conjunction with Sangs rgyas mnyan pa transmitting him the bodhisattva vows from the traditions of both Aśaṅga and Nāgārjuna, the Karmapa studied the commentaries related to the precepts (*bslab bya*) and esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) of the bodhisattvas such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.<sup>87</sup>

Along with the tantric empowerments, which constitute the reception of tantric vows, the Karmapa studied the root tantras (*rtsa rgyud*) and the explanatory tantras (*bshad rgyud*), as well as the necessary rituals (*sādhana*), side-rituals (*las tshog*), reading transmissions (*lung*), and, most importantly, the meditation instructions (*khrid*) and esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) of the creation and completion stages.<sup>88</sup> These transmissions were not limited to tantric cycles popular in the bKa' brgyud traditions but incorporated the four schools and the nine vehicles of the rNying ma pa.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> For the following depiction of the teachings received see Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i mnam thar*, fol. 3a (p. 334); *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 3bf. (p. 355f.); Sangs rgyas dpal grub, 20bf. (p. 189f.) and *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232f. For an introduction to the three vow theories, see Sobisch (2002a: 9–15).

<sup>86</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232, reads: 'The bigger and smaller scriptures teaching the precepts of those [the vows]' (*de'i bslab bya ston pa'i gzhung che chung nams*). This probably refers to the *Vinayasūtra* (*Q*, no. 5619) and its commentaries; 'Vinaya' in Tibet referring to the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins (Tucci 1980: 111; see Prebish 1975: 44–96, for a translation of the Sanskrit *Prātimokṣasūtras* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins).

<sup>87</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232: 'He brought forth the mind set on enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) from the two traditions of the chariot holders [Nāgārjuna and Aśaṅga] and the treatises of the conduct part that show the precepts of it (*bodhicitta*)' (*shing rta srol gnyis las byang chub tu sems bskyed de de'i bslab bya ston pa'i spyod phyogs kyi gzhung 'grel man ngag nams dang*). It is assumed that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* belonged to these commentaries, plausibly also works such as *Mahāyānasamgraha* and *Ratnāvali*.

<sup>88</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21a (p. 190) term these the limitless 'esoteric precepts of the creation and completion stages' (*man ngag bskyed rdzogs*). All narratives use the common Tibetan scheme of the four tantra classes, occasionally listing an example for each, such as Vajrapāṇi for the *kriyā-tantras*, Vajradhātuma for the *yoga-tantras*, and Kālacakra for the *anuttarayoga-tantras*.

<sup>89</sup> In *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 3b (p. 355f), the term 'play of awareness empowerment' (*rig pa rtsal gyi dbang*) is found in the context of the nine vehicles of the rNying ma pa.

Finally, the esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) are listed, which usually accompany the completion stage of tantric meditation.<sup>90</sup> The enumeration of nine profound instructions (*gdams pa zab mo*) that he received is similar to Kong sprul's main eight transmission lineages: Sa skya, bKa' brgyud, 'Jo nang, Zhwa lu, Severance (*gcod*), Pacifying (*zhi byed*) and Dwags po bKa' brgyud, Shang pa bKa' brgyud and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*).<sup>91</sup> He also received numerous transmissions of other bKa' brgyud schools, such as 'Ba' rom, Tshal pa, Phag mo gru pa, as well as 'Bri gung, sTag lung, and 'Brug pa teaching cycles.<sup>92</sup>

### *Practice of the Great Seal under Sangs rgyas mnyan pa*

It is vital for this thesis to pay attention to how sources account for the Karmapa's receiving of the Great Seal, thus significant passages are translated and analysed.<sup>93</sup> The spiritual memoir *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, without mentioning the Great Seal explicitly, states:

... remembering [my teacher] day and night, I received the four empowerments uninterruptedly through the profound path of the *vajra-yoga*.<sup>94</sup>

This expression is in accord with Great Seal practice as known in the tantras. In another spiritual memoir, the Karmapa explicitly specifies the realisation of the Great Seal.<sup>95</sup> After a description of his studies, the Karmapa states:

I fully and wholly obtained and pondered (*snyams*) the instructions (*gdams pa*) of [our] lineage, [e.g.] the varieties of instructions (*gdams pa*) of Nāro

<sup>90</sup> Newman (2000: 587–589), Cozort (1996: 337).

<sup>91</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* fol. 3b (p. 355). The term 'bKa' brgyud' used here most likely refers to all major and minor lineages, as the subcategories Dwags po and Shangs pa are mentioned separately.

<sup>92</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21a (p. 190). At times, the completion stage practices are mentioned by name, such as the six yogas (*sbyor drug*) usually connected to the Kālacakra-cycle, the path and fruit (*lam 'bras*), or the five stages (*rim lnga*).

<sup>93</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 3a (p. 334). Verhufen (1995: 60) translates the very brief passage in the spiritual biography about Sangs rgyas mnyan pa in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1205 and the according sentences from *Kam tshang* (Verhufen 1995: 83–84).

<sup>94</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4a (p. 356): *nyin msthan nam dran zab lam rdo rje'i mal 'byor gyi sgo nas dbang bzhi chag med du len pa'o*. Unfortunately, it is not clear which kind of *vajra-yoga* is meant here. Essentially, it could be any tantric practice of the completion stage.

<sup>95</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar rje nyid kyis rnam thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa*, fol. 3a (p. 334).

and Maitrī such as the six doctrines of Nāro (*nā ro chos drug*), the Great Seal, and the [deity] recitations and accomplishment<sup>96</sup> [of] *Ras chung pa*. [This was] whatever the Self Arisen Padmavajra [The Third Karmapa] had obtained (*nod*).<sup>97</sup>

During the three years that I attended the Great Buddha mNyan pa with devotion, for the very sake of obtaining the good qualities, there was no other method to be influenced (*'jug*) by [his] compassion than training in pure appearances (*dag snang*)!<sup>98</sup> By means of that, all possibilities (*gnas skabs*) of wrong view were defeated; and through the wisdom which knows that the teacher is without mistake, [I] was blessed, his kindness being incomparable to that of others.<sup>99</sup>

Notably, the Karmapa enumerates the six doctrines, the Great Seal, and practices of *Ras chung pa* as key practices of the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage. But how does one practice such instructions? Training in pure appearances (*dag snang*) (in connection with the teacher) is regarded as the crucial method, which implies that the practitioner must attempt to perceive the guru as an embodiment of enlightenment: a fully awakened Buddha.

The spiritual memoir composed by the Karmapa's student Sangs rgyas dpal grub, too, accentuates the role of the spiritual instructor.<sup>100</sup> According to Sangs rgyas dpal grub, the transmission of the lineage from teacher to student, compared to one butter lamp filling the other, is possible because in the oral transmission (*bka' babs*) of Tilo and Nāro the lama appears as Buddha. Realisation (of the Great Seal) is thus equated with the conferring

<sup>96</sup> Zhang Yisun: *bsnyen sgrub – yi dam gyi sngags bzla ba dang sgom sgrub byed pa*.

<sup>97</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar rje*, fol. 3b (p. 335): *rang byung mtsho skyes rdo rje*. Zhang Yisun: *mtsho skyes rdo rje* is one of the eight forms of Padmasambhava (*guru mtshan brgyad*). But here it refers to the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (supported by the context and oral communication, mKhan po Nges don, March 2007).

<sup>98</sup> This pure view can be interpreted, according to mKhan po Nges don, as meaning that the Guru should be seen as Buddha.

<sup>99</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar rje*, fol. 3b (p. 335): *brgyud pa'i gdams pa nā ro chos drug dang/ /phyag rgya chen po ras chung bsnyen grub sogs/ / nā ro maitrī'i gdams pa ji snyed pa/ /rang byung mtsho skyes rdo rje gang nod kun/ /lhag ma med par phal cher thib bam snyam/ /de tshe sangs rgyas chen po mnyan pa la/ /lo gsum bar du gus pas bsten pa na/ /legs pa'i yon tan thob pa'i ched nyi kyi/ /dag snang sbyang thugs rjes 'jug thabs gzhan/ /med pas log lta'i gnas skabs kun bcom nas/ /yongs 'dzin 'khrul med shes pa'i shes rab kyi/ /gzhan dring (drin) med par byin gyis rlabs par mdzad/*.

<sup>100</sup> True to the genre, the Karmapa's studies are described in idealised manner in Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21a (p. 190): 'At the time of studying he remembered every word, at the time of contemplation he [achieved] certainty in the meaning and at the time of meditation he let arise in his mindstream as many particular experiences as possible' (*thos pa'i dus su tshig zin/ bsam pa'i dus don nges/ sgom pa'i dus su thugs rgyud la myong khyad par can ci skyer mdzad pa*).

of blessing. This would, however, be dependent upon the fact that the Karmapa would be a high incarnation and had attended his teachers with veneration and respect.<sup>101</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che confirms:

In particular [the Karmapa] perfected the oral transmission (*bka' babs*) of blessing; since the lineage of [understanding the ultimate] meaning and [receiving] blessing of the incomparable Dwags po bKa' brgyud was transferred to his mind, like from one butter lamp a second is lit.<sup>102</sup>

These accounts implicate, that it was at this point the Karmapa attained accomplishment; at least it was an outward demonstration of his already enlightened mind.<sup>103</sup> In the context of the later education, depicted below, it is evident that training and understanding of the Great Seal preceeded the Eighth Karmapa's scholastic studies. It is noteworthy that the actual term 'Great Seal' is used only once in one of the Karmapa's spiritual memoirs.

Throughout this period of education with Sangs rgyas mnyan pa, the Karmapa continued to travel with him to various monasteries in Eastern Tibet, such as Rab ko, Ra 'og, Tsher lung mda', Kre yul dom tsha nang, where he appointed various abbots. He was even received by the saṅgha of the far eastern great Jo nang seat in 'Dzam thang.<sup>104</sup>

When, in 1519, messengers arrived from the Ming king Wu-tsung the Eighth Karmapa declined the invitation and continued to travel to Li thang where he composed a praise of Nāgārjuna.<sup>105</sup> On that occasion, the

<sup>101</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21a (p. 190).

<sup>102</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1233: *khyad par mnyam med dwags po bka' brgyud kyi byin rlabs don kyi brgyud pa mar me gcig las gnyis pa mched pa ltar thugs la 'phos pas byin rlabs kyi bka' babs rdzogs pa gyur la*.

<sup>103</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21b (p. 191). Sangs rgyas dpal grub remarks that the Karmapa's way of adhering to a teacher would be inconceivable to us (*rang chag*) and propounds the great spiritual value of seeing or thinking about this *nam thar* (here maybe 'complete liberation'), again showing the inspirational function of such narratives.

<sup>104</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232. For the 'Dzam thang area (situated further to the east of sDe dge), see Dorje (1999: 612). The Jo nang monastery survived the persecutions and recently Kapstein discovered an edition of Dol po pa's *gsung 'bum* (Kapstein 1992; see also Stearns 1999: 2).

<sup>105</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1233. According to Richardson (1980: 348), the party carried an invitation-letter by Wu-tsung authored in 1516. According to *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1234, the Eighth Karmapa was again invited to China upon returning to Byang chub gling and to Karma dgon. This time a large army is mentioned, which must have raised Tibetan anxieties (Richardson 1980: 349). The story goes that, when sitting in front of the statue of the First Karmapa, it told him not to go to China this time (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1234). Tucci (1949: 255, n. 95) had noted with Chinese sources that it was the Fourth Dalai Lama (1475–1543) who had been invited; but *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* is clearly indicating the Eighth Karmapa. Chinese and Tibetan sources are also at variance when it comes to the supposed attack on the inviting party, which each ascribe to Tibetans or the Chinese



Karmapa visited the Gling drung family and received a Kālacakra transmission from Sangs rgyas mnyan pa in mTshur phu.<sup>106</sup> After guiding the Karmapa, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa was pleased and his wishes were fulfilled.<sup>107</sup> He passed away in the first month of the hare year (1519).<sup>108</sup> During the funeral rites, the Karmapa uttered a verse in veneration of his teacher and had a vision of Sangs rgyas mnyan pa on the shoulder of the Buddha statue.<sup>109</sup> The Karmapa spent the Tibetan New Year of the ensuing dragon year (1520) in Tsher lung monastery.<sup>110</sup>

### *Becoming a Scholar: Studies with bDud mo ba bKra shis 'od zer*

bDud mo ba bKra shis 'od zer played a decisive and heretofore unacknowledged role in shaping the Eighth Karmapa's development as a Buddhist scholar. From Sangs rgyas mnyan pa's death onwards until meeting mKhan chen Chos grub and Karma 'phrin las pa, the Karmapa mainly relied on this teacher.<sup>111</sup> In the fourth month of the dragon year (1520) the Eighth

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envoys, respectively (Richardson 1980: 348–349). The Fourth Karmapa (1340–1383) had established ties with Ming Taizu (reigned 1368–1398); and the Fifth Karmapa, too, visited the court of Ch'eng-tsu, who at first tried to emulate the former Sa skya-Mongol relations (Sperling 1980: 186–189). From then on, successive Karmapas had loose ties to the Ming kings (Kapstein 2006b: 123–124). When shortly afterwards invited to Mongolia (*Kam tshang*, p. 316.), the Karmapa declined the invitation; the contact to Mongolia under Dayan Khan (1465–1543) seems to have been rather formal (Richardson 1980: 349).

<sup>106</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1233. This passage is examined in conjunction with the *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan* in Chapter Five (5.3.1).

<sup>107</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1234, concludes the three years of study: '[The Karmapa] received day and night—uninterruptedly—empowerments, reading transmissions, explanations (*bshad*), and experiential instructions (*mnyam khrid*); he made their meaning an experience. Through studying texts doubts were removed (*gcod par mdzad*) immediately and [his] realisation of the wisdom of how things are and how they appear [became] most excellent' (*nyin mtshan bar med du dbang lung bshad nyams khrid rnams gsan/ de'i don thugs nyams su bzhes/ phyag dpe gzigs rtog gi sgo nas 'dags pa'ang 'phral du gcod par mdzad cing ji lta ba ji snyed kyi mkhyen pa rtogs phul du byung*).

<sup>108</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 316. Verhufen, (1995: 61, translating *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1205) explains that he died in his 'middling monastic seat', i.e. in one of his monasteries near lDan ma.

<sup>109</sup> This event may have taken place in Byang chub gling. See also Verhufen (1995).

<sup>110</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 318.

<sup>111</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4a, calls him a 'bodhisattva abiding on the eighth level' (*sa brgyad pa la gnas pa'i byang chub sems dpa'*). According to a brief account of bDud mo ma's life in *Kam tshang*, pp. 261–261, he had received the name 'bKra shis 'od zer' from the Seventh Karmapa. From his eighth year onwards he studied with a dGe lugs pa dGe bshes and deepened his education in dGa' lDan monastery. He had later met the Seventh Karmapa and received instructions of the Great Seal, the six doctrines of Nāropa,

Karmapa travelled to Ra ti dGa' ldan gling, learning with bDud mo ba intensely for approximately three years. During that time the envoys from China probably attempted to summon the Karmapa for the last time, although sources contain slightly conflicting explanations.<sup>112</sup>

A spiritual memoir offers insight into the young Karmapa's most likely motives for his refusal to journey to the Chinese court.<sup>113</sup> The passage at first recounts the belief that the Seventh Karmapa had prophesied that he had—in order to protect the doctrine—manifested in his own form and that of the king of China. When the king urgently wished to receive teachings from the rebirth of the Karmapa, the spiritual memoir states:

At that time [I] was still a child, [and] even if I had not been one, I did not have in my mind even partially the qualities needed for going to serve as a spiritual teacher of a magically emanated [Chinese] emperor. Therefore, feeling intimidated, I was fed up with my own past deeds. [And I wondered] about my being called 'Karmapa', asking, for what [action] is it the punishment (*nyes pa*)?<sup>114</sup>

This passage is imbued with a pleasant humility and exhibits some rather personal traits. Studies with bDud mo ba made amends for the Karmapa's need of a more elaborate scholastic education. After receiving explanations on tantric teachings (*rgyud kyi bshad bka'*) such as the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* and the famed *Zab mo nang gi don* (*Profound Inner Meaning*), the Eighth Karmapa engaged in intense study of sūtra teachings such as the

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the *dohā*-cycles, and teachings on numerous scholastic topics. He became teacher of the Eighth Karmapa towards the end of his life.

<sup>112</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236, mentions that in the fourth month of the dragon year, 'it seems' (*snang*) he went to Ra ti dGa' ldan gling, met bDud mo ba, and met the messengers of the Chinese emperor (*gser yig pas*). The spiritual memoir Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 4a (p. 336), mentions only the Karmapa's fourteenth year, which would be around 1520. The succession of events in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (p. 1233f.) and *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 318, however, suggests that at least two visits had taken place before 1519, when Sangs rgyas mnyan pa passed away. Only after the last futile attempt to invite the young lama, the king passed away in 1521 (1520 according to *Kaṃ tshang*), which is in turn viewed as an indication of the Karmapa's clairvoyance. The spiritual memoir discussed below, however, offers a more 'personal' explanation.

<sup>113</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 3b–4b (p. 335–338).

<sup>114</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 4a (p. 336): *de tshe bdag ni lang tsho ma rdzogs shing/ /lang tsho rdzogs kyang sprul pa'i rgyal po yi/ dge ba'i bshes su 'gro ba'i yon tan bi/ /cha shas tsam yang rgyud la ma 'tshal bas/ sems zhum rang gi las la yi chad de/ /bdag la karma pa zhes grags pa yi/ bla dwags 'di 'dra ci yi nyes pa yin/*.

*dharma*s of Maitreya (*byams pa'i chos*), the *pāramitās* and various doctrinal systems (*grub mtha'*).<sup>115</sup>

The spiritual memoir reports that he deepened his understanding, and perfected his skills in the deeds of a scholar (e.g. composition, exposition, and debate) to such an extent that he was confident of guiding others effectively and 'grant [them] realisation' (*rtogs par sbyin pa*).<sup>116</sup> This would not exclude the possibility that the Karmapa had been previously able to teach general topics, meditation practices or even the Great Seal in an intuitive way.

Consequently, after studying with bDud mo ba, the Karmapa started to give more elaborate teachings on scriptures and treatises, visiting important religious sites, and giving lessons to large audiences, mainly in the areas of Kong po, Dwags po, and Khams.<sup>117</sup> Further deeds expected from an incarnate lama are accounted for: doing retreat; recognising incarnations and appointing abbots as well as establishing further ties with important donors and patrons.<sup>118</sup>

After meeting Ngo khrod Rab 'byams pa in rNam thos kyi ri bo, the young Karmapa received a letter from the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa. The Zhwa dmar pa expressed his deep wish of wanting to meet the Karmapa despite difficult conditions, offering him all his monasteries, including the patrons. This meant the Karmapa had to take charge of a significant body of monasteries in dBus and gTsang, along with growing responsibility and influence.<sup>119</sup> Within three years, the Zhwa dmar pa passed away (1524).

At age seventeen (1523), on a pilgrimage to the relics (*sku gdung*) of Padmasambhava, problems in Kong po interrupted his travels. He re-

<sup>115</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21b (p. 191). The corpus of teachings termed 'dharma of Maitreya' contains such texts as the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, which elaborates on the stages of realisation of a bodhisattva (Dreyfus 2005a: 277, 281).

<sup>116</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 22a (p. 192). How he deepened his understanding is literally expressed as 'nature of objects of knowledge' *shes bya'i gnas tshul* (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar* fol. 4b/p. 377).

<sup>117</sup> Passing the lunar New Year of the snake year (1521) in Lhun po rtse, he continued to visit holy places, such as the birthplace of the First Karmapa, and taught in Ri bo che. It is reported that at this time he already passed on the *upāsaka* vows (*dge bsnyen*) to students (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 320).

<sup>118</sup> The king of Mon in the southern borderland adjoining Bhutan offered gold and various other precious substances (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 326). Dorje (1999: 199): 'Tsho na county is the modern name for Mon yul, the vast region to the east of Lho brak and south of Lhun rtse bordering on Bhutan.'

<sup>119</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, 1259–1260; *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 322.

conciled the parties there.<sup>120</sup> After passing the Tibetan New Year sheep year (*lug lo*, 1523) in Phu lung, he imparted the Buddhist refuge to the young rGyal tshab pa Grags pa dPal 'byor and exposition on the *Byams chos sde lnga* (*Five Treatises of Maitreya*) to the sTag lung pa.<sup>121</sup> He then journeyed to dGa' ldan Ma mo in Eastern Tibet, where he taught meditation instructions.<sup>122</sup> Continuing his travels, he identified a young boy as the rebirth of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, gave him Buddhist refuge and the name dKon mchog yan lag. The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa would become his most important student. In the lunar New Year (*lo gsar*) of the pig year (1527) he passed Ba yo.<sup>123</sup>

### *Full Ordination and Formal Completion of Studies*

In 1527, the twenty-one year old Karmapa met Karma 'phrin las pa and Chos grub seng ge; this marked his entry into the last phase of becoming a thoroughly trained scholar and fully ordained monk.<sup>124</sup> The then seventy-two year old Karma 'phrin las pa, learned in both the Sa skya and bKa' brgyud traditions, had already acted as tutor of the young dPa' bo Rin po che and many other illustrious masters.<sup>125</sup>

After their first meeting, the Karmapa invited both Chos grub Seng ge and Karma 'phrin las pa to rNam thos kyi ri bo in Kong po and requested full ordination.<sup>126</sup> On the third day of the eleventh month of the pig year (1527/ 28) the Karmapa received ordination (*upasampadā*) into full monkhood (*bhikṣu*) in front of the assembled saṅgha. mKhan chen Chos grub

<sup>120</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 4b (p. 337).

<sup>121</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 323. There he had a dream of the 'Bri gung chos rje Kun dga' rin chen and Sa skya Paṇḍita, who in the end recited the Karmapa mantra (*ibid.*, p. 321).

<sup>122</sup> dGa' ldan Ma mo was the main establishment of the Zhwa dmar pas in Eastern Tibet. It had been founded as a hermitage by the Second Zhwa dmar, mKha' spyod dbang po in 1386 and been expanded later (Ehrhard 2002a: 15).

<sup>123</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 325.

<sup>124</sup> For the First Karma 'phrin las pa's life and works and his teaching the Karmapa and dPa' bo Rin po che, see Rheingans (2004).

<sup>125</sup> Before this first meeting *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 327, describes a dream in which he appears to the Karmapa.

<sup>126</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 22b (p. 193). So far this monastery could not be further localised. The text only specifies the site of the Karmapa's ordination as 'the temple in the seclusion of rNam thos kyi ri bo' (*rnam thos kyi ri bo'i sang dben gtsug lag khang*). At their first meeting Karma 'phrin las pa bestowed upon him tantric instructions such as 'the six teachings of refined gold' (*chos drug gser zhun ma*), as well as 'the great six teachings' (*chos drug chen mo*) (Rheingans 2004: 121).

Seng ge was the *upādhyāya*, Karma 'phrin las pa had the role of *karmācārya*, and dPal Shākya bzang po acted as *raho'nuśāsaka*.<sup>127</sup> The Karmapa received the name of Chos grub grags pa dpal bzang ('Accomplished Dharma, Good Radiant Fame').<sup>128</sup>

Chos grub Seng ge decisively influenced the Karmapa's early adherence to the *gzhan stong* in his *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*-commentary, his first major scholastic work.<sup>129</sup> Along with instructions on tantric cycles such as Guhyasamāja, Cakrasaṃvara, Kālacakra, and Amitāyus, Chos grub Seng ge taught him the '*Dul ba me tog phreng ba* (*Vinaya Flower Garland*).<sup>130</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che reports:

He taught him various large *gzhan stong* explanations (*bshad pa*) and asked him to uphold [this] view. Therefore he later commented on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* in the tradition of Jo [nang] and Zi [lung pa].<sup>131</sup>

And Karmapa said:

And the mKhan po said, giving [me] the book of the *Me tog phreng brgyud*, 'Explain this meaning'; and [then] I studied well the treatise known as the *bsTan pa spyi 'grel* (*General Commentary on the Doctrine*), composed by the omniscient Dol po pa.<sup>132</sup>

The Karmapa also studied the sixfold yoga (*yan lag drug*) with Chos grub seng ge, a practice which, in the context of Kālacakra, is strongly connected to the *gzhan stong* teachings.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>127</sup> The *karmācārya*'s role at a ceremony is to read the texts, while 'the teacher for the secret' or 'private instructor' (*raho'nuśāsaka*, *gsang ston*) inquires about hindering conditions (the term is *raho'nuśāsaka* is confirmed in Edgerton 1953). For ordination in early Vinaya, see Frauwallner 1956; for *pravrajyā* and *upasampadā* in early Buddhism, see Prebish 1975: 2–5.

<sup>128</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236; Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 22b (p. 193).

<sup>129</sup> This significantly adds to understanding the context of the Eighth Karmapa's Madhyamaka-viewpoint; it was neither noted by Williams (1983a), nor Ruegg (1988).

<sup>130</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 23a (p. 194).

<sup>131</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236. Zi lung pa is Śākya mChog ldan (Stearns 1999: 214, n. 129).

<sup>132</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 5a (p. 338).

<sup>133</sup> See Stearns (1999: 37ff.). Soon after the ordination, Chos grub seng ge passed away (Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 23b/p. 195, *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236). Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bslab pa'i khrid*, fol. 3a (p. 119), describes Chos grub seng ge's last words. The Karmapa has also written a praise of Chos grub seng ge: *mKhan chen chos grub seng ge la bstod pa*, 2 fols. This title contains two texts: A praise of mKhan chen Chos grub seng ge (title, up to 2a.1), which was written in rNam thos kyi ri bo and it is therefore likely that the Karmapa composed it around 1527–1530. It is followed by a praise of the Karmapa, *Karma pa brgyad pa' i bka' bstod* (–2b), probably written by Chos grub seng ge.

A spiritual memoir additionally states that he was motivated to comment in *gzhan stong*-fashion in order to continue the work of his predecessor: the Seventh Karmapa had started this commentary with the agenda of averting the danger of understanding emptiness as nihilism (*chad stong*), but could not complete it.<sup>134</sup> The Eighth Karmapa began composing the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*-commentary in 1529 in rTse lha khang (completed in 1531), where he had spent some time in concentrated meditation (*bya bral*), and studied the Seventh Karmapa's treatise on Buddhist epistemology with Śākya Rin chen.<sup>135</sup>

The Karmapa had studied the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* during a period of extensive education at the feet of the aged Karma 'phrin las pa, following his ordination in 1527. A key passage illustrates the scope of his studies:

In the beginning he (the Karmapa) studied with the master (*rje*) Karma 'phrin las pa, a commentary of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* [called] clarifying the meaning (*don gsal*)<sup>136</sup>, during three sessions each day. [The Karmapa] asked to raise the [number of] sessions [per day] and ['Phrin las pa] answered: 'if we did that, wouldn't it be a mere pretense of studying?' But [the Karmapa] recited the words and the meaning [of the treatise by heart], just as they were and [then] they did eight to nine sessions [every day]. Within only two months he knew [the text] completely.

Then he learned again the great treatises of sūtra and tantra: The other four teachings of Maitreya, *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, *Pramāṇavārttika*, *Nyāyabindu*, the four *Gyes* (*sic!*) *pa'i bstan bcos*<sup>137</sup>, *Abhidharmakośa* and *Abhidharmasa-*

<sup>134</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 5b (p. 339) and fol. 7a (p. 341). It has to be taken into account that this source stems from the year 1534, i.e. before the Eighth Karmapa had composed his monumental Madhyamaka work. An interlinear remark of unknown origin in yet another text reads that the Eighth Karmapa taught *gzhan stong* due to a request by Chos grub seng ge, but it was not his extraordinary (*thun mong ma yin pa*) ultimate (*mthar thug*) view (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *dPal rdo rje dbyang can 'jigs pa dang bral ba'i zhal lnga [snga] nas kyi mdzad pa nges don nying khu zhes bya ba*, fol. 4b/p. 852). Neither authorship of the Eighth Karmapa is explicitly stated nor is the author of the interlinear remarks known (who due to the phrasing seems to be someone else). Si tu Paṇ chen's later *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 326, relates the *gzhan stong* with a visionary experience. It needs to be remembered that Si tu bStan pa'i nyin byed was himself a supporter of the *gzhan stong* theory.

<sup>135</sup> For the place see *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 336. For the date, see the colophon of this text in *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i lung chos mtha' dag*, vol. 12, fol. 342f.

<sup>136</sup> '*Grel pa don gsal* most likely refers to Harbihadra's *Śāstra-vṛtti* also called *Sphuṭārtha* (Ruegg 1988: 1271).

<sup>137</sup> *Gyes* is likely a wrong or variant of *dgyes* for *dgyes pa rdo rje*, 'Hevajra'; thus maybe 'the four treatises of Hevajra'. *Gyes pa* as such is a past form of 'gyes pa; another form of *gye ba* = 'to be divided, to separate, to part, to issue, proceed'. The Sanskrit *He* in Hevajra is an exclamative particle and signifies great compassion according to Kāṇha.

*muccaya*<sup>138</sup>, the *Vinayasūtra*, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Madhyamakāvatāra*, *rTag gnyis* (*The Two Chapters, i.e. the Hevajratantra*)<sup>139</sup>, and the *rTsis kun bsdu pa* (*Summary of Astrology*). [Furthermore] the manuals (*yig cha*) of rNgog Lo tsā ba and Phya [pa Chos kyi seng ge] and gTsang [nag pa] as well as *sDom gsum rab dbyed* and *Rigs gter* (*Treasury of Knowledge*) of Sa [skya] Paṇ[ḍita].

In short: he studied the entire words and the meaning of twenty-five great texts and comprehended them easily! The [tantric] empowerments, permissions (*rjes gnang*), esoteric precepts, and meditation instructions, which he received in the breaks, were immeasurable.

He studied for three years [but in fact] followed classes for fourteen months [only]<sup>140</sup>, studying and reflecting uninterruptedly. However, [this time] seemed to be just one year. Meanwhile he comprehended the deep [meaning] of every single teaching and hardly took breaks for tea: he reflected on the words and meaning day and night, examined the doubts about the difficult points, and analysed contradictions. The precious teacher [Karma 'phrin las pa] in turn greatly praised [the Karmapa's] mental energy and knowledge!<sup>141</sup>

Most sources consider these intense studies with Karma 'phrin las pa, which certainly emphasised the detailed study of the great treatises and Buddhist epistemology, to have been the formal completion of his studies.<sup>142</sup> During that time, the Karmapa also engaged in yogic

<sup>138</sup> Lit.: 'the upper and lower *Abhidharma*'.

<sup>139</sup> Commentary on the *Hevajra-Tantra*.

<sup>140</sup> This means that he seems to actually have had lessons for fourteen months within three years. In the breaks he could have received empowerments or gone on short retreats.

<sup>141</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1237: *rje phrin las zhabs las thog mar mngon rtogs rgyan gyi 'grel pa don gsal la nyin re mthun gsum gyis gsan par mdzad pa na thun mang du spar par zhush pas de ltar na gsan lo las mi yong ngam gsung pa na slar tshig don rnams ji lta ba bskyar bas thun brgyad dgu tsam mdzad ste zla ba gnyis tsam gyis dpyis phyin par mkhyen nas/ slar byams chos gzhan bzhi tshad ma kun btus/ nam 'grel nges/ rigs thig/ gyes (sic!) pa'i bstan bcos bzhi/ mngon pa gong 'og/ dul ba mdo rtso/ dbu ma rtso shes 'jug/ brtag gnyis/ rtis kun bsdu pa sogs mdo sngags kyi gzhung chen rnams dang/ bod yul gyi rngog lo dang phyag gtsang gi yig cha/ sa paṇ gyi sdom rig la sogs mdor na gzhung chen nyer lnga'i tshig don thams cad gsan zhiṅg bde glag tu khong du chud par mdzad/ de dag gi bar rnams su dbang rjes gnang man ngag khrid gsan pa ni mtha' yas/ de ltar gsan pa'i yun lo ngo gsum zla ba [in smaller letters dngos] bcu bzhi la gsan bsam bar ma chad pa lo gcig kho nar snang rung de srid gsol ja'ang cung zad las mi bzhes par nyin mtshan bar med par tshig don bsam pa dka' gnas (=gnad?) la dogs dpyad rgal brtag sogs kyi chos so so'i gting dpogs par mdzad ste/ slob dpon rin po che kyang 'di lta bu'i thugs kyi brtson pa dang mkhyen pa ces bsngags par mdzad/.*

<sup>142</sup> It is evident that the Karmapa respected Karma 'phrin las pa greatly: he is said to have carried a piece of his hair with him continuously (*Kam tshang*, 1972 edition, p. 651). Karma 'phrin las pa also foretold the Karmapa's vast activities; Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bsal pa'i khrid*, fol. 3a (p. 119): 'The venerable 'Phrin las pa said: "For the one holding the name of Karmapa, the [Buddha] activity will become greater and greater; [namely the Buddha activity] which proclaims

practices.<sup>143</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub adds that the Karmapa, through the final studies with Karma 'phrin las pa, found the confidence (*spobs pa*) to teach, debate, and compose on the scriptures studied.<sup>144</sup> *Kaṃ tshang* recounts that the Karmapa emphasised study and reflection from his tenth year onwards and from his twenty-third year was not distracted from meditation under any circumstances.<sup>145</sup>

The Karmapa met the eighty-four year old Karma 'phrin las pa for a last time in 1538 in dBus. On that occasion the Karmapa received further teachings from the bKa' brgyud, Bo dong, Jo nang, and Zhwa lu traditions.<sup>146</sup>

When recounting how he paid respect to these four qualified teachers, the Eighth Karmapa praised their qualities: they would not—like most teachers 'these days' (*deng sang*)—just act in order to receive veneration and respect. He continues explaining that the main cause of Buddhahood is receiving instructions on higher knowledge from one's teacher, and that one should rely on a teacher until one has attained enlightenment.<sup>147</sup> Yet the Karmapa's education was not limited to what he learned under his four main teachers.<sup>148</sup> On later visits to the main monasteries in dBus and

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extensively in any direction the name of Karmapa, which in [this] time has come upon you!"' (*rje 'phrin las pas/ karma pa'i mtshan 'dzin pa cig la khyed cag dus la dpags pa'i karma pa'i mtshan phyogs med du rgyas par sgrogs pa'i 'phrin las ches che bar 'ong zhes bka' stsal ba dang/*).

<sup>143</sup> In *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4a.5 (p. 356), for example, the Karmapa used the name 'Great Yogi of the Great Seal Karma 'phrin las pa' (*phyag rgya chen po'i mal 'byor pa chen po karma 'phrin las pa*). Apart from those described in the translated passage above, Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 24a (p. 196), further specifies the tantric transmissions the Karmapa had received from Karma 'phrin las pa: Hevajra and Tārā, and further profound teaching such as the 'Oral transmission of the Karma [bKa' brgyud]' (*karma snyan rgyud*). The whole passage of what and how Karmapa studied with Karma 'phrin las pa is strikingly similar to the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*.

<sup>144</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 24a (p. 196).

<sup>145</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1258; *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 328 f. Their reading varies slightly.

<sup>146</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 24a (p. 196), just reads 'later in dBus'. Their last meeting is the only second meeting documented and it probably took place in dBus (see also *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 340). This last meeting is described touchingly in the last lines of the spiritual biography of Karma 'phrin las pa the Eighth Karmapa composed (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun karma 'phrin las pa'i rnam thar*, fol. 7a).

<sup>147</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bslab pa'i khrid*, fol. 3b (p. 120).

<sup>148</sup> The narratives are replete with spiritual songs of realisation and visions (in particular *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*), depicting a visionary relationship to a Buddha or Buddhist master. Sometimes these visions are said to deepen understanding of the Great Seal. Among others,



gTsang he relied on numerous tutors from the emerging schools of dGe lugs, Sa skya, rNying ma, Jo nang, 'Bri gung, sTag lung, and Zhwa lu.<sup>149</sup>

#### 4.1.5 Scholastic Contributions (1530–1550)

The remainder of the Eighth Karmapa's life is summarised here. The sources portray it as a succession of the typical deeds of a Buddhist scholar and meditation master: teaching, composition, and debate; interrupted by periods of further study and meditation, pilgrimage, or the founding of monasteries, scriptural seminaries (*bshad grwa*), and meditation centres (*sgrub sde*).

In 1530, the Karmapa studied grammar extensively with Karma Lo tsā ba Rin chen bkra shis (b. fifteenth century) in rNam thos kyi ri bo in (Kong po); the notes he took were later compiled into an extensive commentary in the sGo lha khang in Tsa ri.<sup>150</sup> After the customary ceremonies and prayers for the Tibetan New Year of the hare year (1531) in Zu ru gdong, the Karmapa expounded various sūtric lessons to a large assembly from Kong po: instructions on the Vinaya, Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* as well as the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*.<sup>151</sup> Upon meeting his important 'moon like student' dPa bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba for the first time, the Karmapa imparted the instructions on the six doctrines of Nāro, and to sDe bdun rab 'byams pa Phyogs glang those of the Or rgyan bsnyen grub.<sup>152</sup>

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*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 335, recounts a vision of Mañjuśrī, saying that the Karmapa received teachings on the stages of the Great Seal meditation of the *dohā*, including points on inner energies.

<sup>149</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1241.

<sup>150</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 123; *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 337; Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 6a (p. 340). For the notes, see the Eighth Karmapa's *Zhwa lu lo tsā ba chos skong bzang po*, fol. 248a (p. 495). It is his commentary on Zhwa lu Lo tsā ba Chos skyong bzang po's (1441–1527/38) commentary. Indian grammar (*kalāpa*) as understood by the Tibetans usually refers to the *Kalāpasūtra* (*Q*, no. 5775, *le* fol. 91a7–110b3/ vol. 140, pp. 38–46).

<sup>151</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 337.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* p. 337. 'O rgyan bsnyen grub originates with the siddha 'O rgyan pa and is connected to the Kālacakra. It began to disintegrate in the fourteenth century (Kapstein 1996: 280). The Karmapa also taught the general explanations of the Buddhist tantras by Bu ston, while to a larger assembly the Karmapa transmitted the empowerments of the five tantra classes (*Kaṃ tshang* p. 338).

In 1532, the Karmapa authored a commentary on the *Vinayasūtra*<sup>153</sup> and began a more extensive one on the *Abhidharmakośa* (1532–1543) in Kong po.<sup>154</sup> Additionally, some works on tantric practice were set down in writing: in 1532 he composed a short treatise on the tantras and an exposition of the five stages (Skt. *pañcakrāma*) of yogic practice.<sup>155</sup> In 1533, he authored instructions for the completion stage, the six yogas of Cakrasaṃvara.<sup>156</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising that it was only in 1537 that the Karmapa set out to approach traditional main centres of dBus and gTsang. The Phag mo gru pa had regained some force and local skirmishes prevailed, especially in Kong po, dBus, and gTsang. In 1534 people from Phrag, probably local sponsors or followers of the Karmapa and Zhwa dmar pa gathered an army in order to destroy the dGe lugs monasteries in Kong po and the other donors and lamas (*yon mchod*) fled. According to *Kaṃ tshang*, the Karmapa averted the danger by explaining: ‘there is no difference between harming a small dGe lugs establishment and cutting [one’s] throat.’<sup>157</sup>

The Karmapa’s ensuing journey to dBus would be seen not only as a religious pilgrimage but one which held political overtones: the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa had passed away, and the Eighth Karmapa had then to fill the power vacuum left in and around Lhasa after the departure of the Rin spungs pa to gTsang. The first dBus based monastery visited was ‘Bri gung. Having spent the New year of the ape year (1536) in Kong po, the Karmapa visited Lho brag, Dwags po, rTsa ri, and finally arrived in ‘Bri gung monastery, most likely accompanied by dPa’ bo Rin po che and the Fifth

<sup>153</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje’i rnam thar*, fol. 5b (p. 339).

<sup>154</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Chos mngon pa’i mdzod kyi ’grel pa* (*Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vols. 10, 11). He composed the first part of this commentary in his twenty-fourth year (1532) in Kong po after he had studied it in 1528 with Karma ’phrin las pa. He based himself on the commentary by mChims Nam mkha’ grags (1253–1290). Encouraged by Karma ’phrin las pa, he wrote in his thirty-third year (1539) the second part in Nyug rGyal khang and finished it in his thirty-seventh year (1543) on a mountain slope of the Yar lha Sham po-mountain (in Lho kha) (*ibid.*, vol. 10, fol. 384bf./p. 766f. and vol. 11, fol. 502b/p. 1004).

<sup>155</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe yid bzang rtse ba’i rgyud gsum gsang ba*, 25 fols, and Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Slob dpon dbyangs can bzang pos nye bar stsal ba’i dril bu rim pa lnga pa’i khrid*, 103 fols. The scribe for the latter text was dPa’ bo gTsong lag phreng ba (*ibid.* fol. 103a/p. 981).

<sup>156</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *dPal sdom pa’i yan lag drug gi rgyas ’grel gyi khrid rnal ’byor gyi sa chen po grub pa dbyangs can bzhad pas sbyar ba*, 92 fols.

<sup>157</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 338: *dge ldan pa’i khang chung zhig la gnod pa byed pa dang mgul bregs pa khyad med*.

Zhwa dmar pa.<sup>158</sup> In 'Bri gung monastery, he exchanged questions with Paṇ chen rdor rgyal ba, met the fifteenth abbot of 'Bri gung, sKyu ra rin po che Rin chen rnam rgyal (1527–1570) and the local lord Bya bKra shis dar rgyas.<sup>159</sup> The Karmapa transmitted empowerments of Cakrasaṃvara and meditation instructions (*khrid*) of the oral transmission of Ras chung pa to the 'Bri gung Rin po che, Paṇ chen rdo rgyal ba, and the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa.

In the branch monastery 'Bri gung thel, the Karmapa expounded on the 'Bri gung pa's famous 'one intention' (*dgongs gcig*) doctrine. dPa bo Rin po che made notes (*zin bris*) of these lessons.<sup>160</sup> The Karmapa's extensive commentaries on the one intention doctrine, including spiritual biographies of 'Bri gung pa 'Jigs rten gsum dgon, documents his keen interest in the subject.<sup>161</sup>

The 'Bri gung abbot and the Zhwa dmar Rin po che continued to travel with the Karmapa in an assembly of lamas to Legs bshad gling.<sup>162</sup> There he instructed them in the 'innate union of the Great Seal' (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor*) and passed on reading transmission of the collection of Lama Zhang's writings (*bka' 'bum*).<sup>163</sup> The Karmapa proceeded to the seat of the Zhwa dmar pa in dBus, Yang pa can, and later to the monastery of sTag

<sup>158</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 338.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* p. 339. He also met Bya 'Jam dbyangs chos rje, a local ruler of the southern area of Bya, which had already sponsored the Seventh Karmapa and First Karma 'phrin las pa. Both Paṇ chen rdor rgyal ba and Bya pa Chos rje are characterised as students of Śākya mchog ldan (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1239).

<sup>160</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 339. This is probably the commentary to the first section (*tshoms dang po*) dPal rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje, 128 fols. It was composed from notes (*zin bris*) dPa' bo Rin po che had made of the Karmapa's teaching on the fifteen points (*gnad rim bco lnga*) of the *dgongs gcig* in the presence of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, dKon mchog yan lag. The Karmapa's *dGongs gcig gi gsung bzhi bcu'i 'grel pa*, 106 fols, was composed in the same year (1536). As for the Karmapa's other 'one intention' commentaries, some may have been written during this period in 'Bri gung and some were evidently composed later, such as the *dGongs gcig gi kar ſik chen mo las 'bras bu'i tshom* in 1545 (which may, in fact, contain the colophon for the remaining undated texts).

<sup>161</sup> In the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, this material encompasses three volumes (vol. 4–6) amounting to around one thousand two hundred folios. These commentaries are not seen as standard interpretation in the 'Bri gung tradition (Sobisch, oral communication, August 2006, Bonn). A song documents the Karmapa's travel to dBus and gTsang and his stay in 'Bri gung (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gSer 'phyang me bya'i lo dngun lo sum cu pa*).

<sup>162</sup> A monastery founded by the First Karma 'phrin las pa in 1504, probably in the area of Dwags po. By 1536 Karma 'phrin las pa had retired from that position after appointing Shes rab rnam rgyal as abbot (Rheingans 2004: 70–71, 86).

<sup>163</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 339.

lung.<sup>164</sup> Yet before progressing to mTshur phu, the Eighth Karmapa travelled north of sTag lung to the dGe lugs seat of Ra sgren. Si tu Rin po che remarks that the Second Dalai Lama himself, dGe 'dun rgya mtsho (1476–1542), and his student bSod nams grags pa (1478–1554) sent a letter, in which they respectfully requested a meeting with the Karmapa.<sup>165</sup> There is no mention of any differences.

Finally, after another visit of Yang pa can, the Karmapa reached mTshur phu in the first month of the bird year (1537).<sup>166</sup> He gave extensive dharma lessons, celebrated the New Year of the following dog year (1538) in mTshur phu, and remained in retreat for some time.<sup>167</sup> When the Karmapa was invited by the sNe'u gdong pa (the Phag mo gru pa ruler), he gave the local people an Avalokiteśvara-empowerment and explicated the great treatises to those of bright intellect (*blo gsal*) from an encampment college (*grwa tshang*). It documents his relations to the resurgent Phag mo gru pa; and the Karmapa, who was by that time a powerful hierarch, issued a letter trying to mediate in the war between dBus and gTsang.<sup>168</sup>

After meeting his attendant and biographer Sangs rgyas dpal grub, the Karmapa stayed in a close retreat for the winter of 1538/39 and imparted on some students a series of tantric and key Great Seal meditation instructions: the mountain teachings (*ri chos*) of Yang dgon pa, the six doctrines of

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. p. 340.

<sup>165</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 340. bSod nams grags pa was abbot of dGa' ldan from 1529 to 1535 and thus an important dGe lugs scholar ([www.tbrc.org](http://www.tbrc.org), 03.07.2007).

<sup>166</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 344.

<sup>167</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Dang por gdan sa chen po mthsur phu phebs ma thag bzhuks du kyi gsung mgur*, fol. 1b (p. 350). Further songs documenting his travels in dBus and gTsang (the first one dating to 1538): Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, 'Di phyin dbus gtsang gi rgyal khams chen por zhabs kyi 'khor lo ris med du bskyod du kyi gsung mgur.

<sup>168</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 341. A so far undated epistle to the sNe'u gdong pa is found in the Karmapa's writings, which may relate to that event: Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bod rgyal po chen po'i rgyal thabs kyi mdzad pa gnam du byas pa sne'u sdong rgyal po la gnam ba rin po che'i 'phreng ba'o*. This letter indeed bears testimony of how the Karmapa handled the relation to this ruler. At first the Karmapa outlines the history of the dharma in Tibet, in particular with regards to the various sponsors and how they furnished the spread of the teaching, such as the early kings, the Sa skya pa and later the Ming kings (through the Karmapa) and even Tai Situ Byang chub rgyal mtshan. Then he laments the state of affairs today (*deng sang*, fol. 3b ff./p. 48ff.) saying that both patrons and priests (*mchod yon*) act negatively, not to mention the ordinary people. This had led to huge amounts of suffering. It seems that he tries to pacify the sNe'u mdong ruler by this kind of epistle. At the end he impresses upon the king some rules from the time of Srong btsan sgam po (605–650). Further textual hints are found in the colophone to the Eighth Karmapa's *sNying po don gsum gyi don khrid*, fol. 13b (p. 559). It, for example, adds that the dharma-politics (*chos srid*) of Phag mo gru may spread.

Nāropa, the 'inseparability of energy-winds and mind' (*rlung sems gnyis med*), the innate union (of the Great Seal), the oral lineage of Ras chung pa, the O rgyan bsnyen grub, the One taste Gang dril (*ro snyoms gang dril*), and the 'seven point mind training' (*blo sbyong don bdun ma*). It seems likely that various meditation manuals were composed at this retreat.<sup>169</sup>

Thereafter the Karmapa travelled to the gTsang province of Central-Western Tibet for the first time, where he, among others, met a Bo dong pa and travelled to g.Yag sde. Upon his return to dBus, he made a pilgrimage to the dGa' ldan Pho brang.<sup>170</sup> The Karmapa continued to strengthen his ties to local rulers in Dwags po and Kong po and frequently visited his sponsors from Dwags po sKu rab.<sup>171</sup> In the monastery of Legs bshad gling he ordained the young Fifth Zhwa dmar pa and transmitted empowerments and meditation instructions (*khrid*) to monks, local rulers, and ministers. He was invited to Dwags po sKu rab in 1543.<sup>172</sup>

During the later years of his life, significant writings were authored. Between 1544 and 1546, the Karmapa completed his *Abhidharmakośa* commentary, composed a further work on the 'Bri gung pa's one intention doctrine,<sup>173</sup> and created his monumental treatise on the *Madhyamakāvatāra*.<sup>174</sup> It is worthwhile to briefly note the circumstances for the composition of this influential treatise. Previous research has noted the possible significance of Se ra brJe btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan's (1469–

<sup>169</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 341. The place mentioned is a hermitage in sKung (*skung gi ri khrod*). So far undated texts may fit into the instructions imparted: for example the Eighth Karmapa's *rJe rgod tshang ba'i ro snyoms sgang dril*, *Blo sbyong gi khrid* and the *rGyal ba yang dgon pa'i ngo sprod bdun ma'i khrid yig*. This last mentioned text was composed in a retreat place near mTshur phu, suggesting that this could be the hermitage where the instructions were given (ibid. fol. 11b/p. 581). The Karmapa probably stayed until the Tibetan New Year of the pig year (1539) in which he authored another spiritual memoir (*Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *rJe mi bskyod rdo rje'i 'phral gyi rnam thar tshigs su bcad pa nyer bdun pa rje nyid kyis mdzad pa*).

<sup>170</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 341.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. p. 344.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *dGongs gcig gi kar 'ik chen mo las 'bras bu'i tshom*.

<sup>174</sup> He set out to compose the *Madhyamaka* commentary in the end of 1544, beginning of 1545. The colophon states the Eighth Karmapa began this work in his thirty-ninth year in a mountain valley of Byar smad skyid phug and completed it in a dwelling called Mon sha 'ug stag sgo dom tshang ngur mo rong (*Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 486a/p. 973). According to *Kam tshang*, p. 344, he did the prayers for the Tibetan New Year of the snake year some time after starting to compose this text. As the Karmapa's thirty-ninth birthday was on the 18 Nov 1544 and the Tibetan New Year on 13 Jan 1545 (both according to the mTshur phu tradition) it must have been during that period.

1546) earlier critique of Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* interpretation along the lines of *gzhan stong* and *nam rdzun* ('false aspectarian') Madhyamaka.<sup>175</sup> However, the exhortation by his teacher Chos grub seng ge to compose the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* commentary (explained above) and the need to continue the work of the Seventh Karmapa has been left almost unnoticed.<sup>176</sup>

Similarly, one particular source of inspiration has been overlooked for his *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*: the crazy yogin Lama Zhang. Si tu Paṇ chen's *Kaṃ tshang* recounts that, through Lama Zhang's blessing (*byin gyis brlabs*), the Karmapa settled the ultimate Madhyamaka view (*mthar thug dbu ma*) to be the tradition of *prāsaṅga* or 'consequentialists'. Being himself inspired by the *gzhan stong*,<sup>177</sup> Si tu Paṇ chen viewed the Eighth Karmapa's commentary as chiefly in conformity with the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje, which he interprets as *gzhan stong*.<sup>178</sup>

An interlinear comment (*mchan*) from the Eighth Karmapa's *Dwags po bka' brgyud kyi bzahg thabs shig* (*Method to Settle [the mind] of the Dwags po bka' brgyud*) offers a more prosaic explanation. When the Eighth Karmapa calls himself blessed by the First Karmapa and Lama Zhang, the interlinear commentary remarks that while the Karmapa first adhered to the 'false aspectarian' (*nam rdzun pa*) view of Cittamātra, later, because he had seen the *Lam mchog mthar thug* (*The Path of Ultimate Profoundity*)<sup>179</sup> by Lama Zhang, he turned to Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka and took Zhang as his root guru.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Chos kyi rGyal mtshan, Se ra rJe btsun, *Kar len glu sgrub dgongs rgyan*, fol. 20b (see also Ruegg 1988: 1271–1272, 1275 and Lopez 1996: 221).

<sup>176</sup> Brunnhölzl (2004: 913, n. 1039), in a footnote, took notice briefly with the help of the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236.

<sup>177</sup> Si tu Paṇ chen was inspired to the *gzhan stong* view by his teacher Kaḥ thog Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755) (Smith 2001: 87–99, Stearns 1999: 74f.).

<sup>178</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 344: *byang skyid phug tu phebs/ zhang g.yu brag pas byin gyis brlabs pa'i snang ba byung ba mthar thug dbu ma'i 'jog 'tshams thal 'gyur 'thad pa'i lugs su gzhe'd nas/ 'jug pa'i tīk chen brtsams mdzad cing thal 'gyur pa'i gzhung 'dzugs par gnang na'ang gtso bor ni rje rang byung zhabs kyi dgongs pa gzhan stong gtso bor mdzad pa'o/ mdzod 'grel la zhus dag gnang/ sprul lo'i smon lam chen po mdzad/*

<sup>179</sup> Zhang Tshal pa brTson 'grus grags, *Phyag rgya chen po lam zab mthar thug zhang gi man ngag*. The text has been translated and commented on by Martin (1992, translation 255–295), and was composed in an earlier part of Zhang's life. However, it already reflects the Great Seal teaching he received from sGam po pa's nephew, Dwags po sGom tshul, and resembles the Indian Buddhist songs of non-dual realisation (ibid. 254).

<sup>180</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Dwags po bka' brgyud kyi bzahg thabs shig*, fol. 7b (p. 734). The author of this interlinear remark, most likely an editor of the various versions of the Eighth Karmapa's writings, remains obscure.

*Lam mchog mthar thug*, a Great Seal instruction resembling a tantric song and focusing on the ineffability of mind, was not considered a highly scholastic commentary. Yet, much like the *Chariot of the Dwags po Siddhas* (*Dwags pa'i sgrub pa'i shing rta*) it is concerned with removing what the Karmapa considered wrong views and indicates the importance of the direct experience of emptiness.<sup>181</sup> In the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, three more texts exhibit evidence of the inspiration of Lama Zhang.<sup>182</sup>

These historical and literary contexts add to our understanding of how the composition of such commentaries was explicated within the textual material by and about the Eighth Karmapa, challenging a tendency to explain such issues from a purely doctrinal or even political perspective.<sup>183</sup> Regarding the Karmapa's development, the attacks of previous masters' views, such as the perceived novelty of Tsong kha pa's interpretation of Madhyamaka, bear testimony of Mi bskyod rdo rje's ability to use the tools of Buddhist logic and exhibit a direct, sometimes ironic, style of debate.<sup>184</sup> The Karmapa's manner of debate is further reflected in his polemics against the rNying ma pa's understanding of the all base consciousness (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*), composed after the beginning of the ox year (1553), near Byams pa gling.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>181</sup> See Chapter Six (6.1), for some of the Great Seal contributions of this treatise.

<sup>182</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Zhang 'gro ba'i mgon po g.yu brag pa'i dam chos bka' rgya mar grags pa*. The first lines (ibid. fol. 1b/p. 576) praise the Karmapa's main teacher Sangs rgyas mnyan pa as being Lama Zhang outwardly (*phyi*), the First Karmapa inwardly (*nam*), secretly (*gsang*) the Great Seal, and on the level of suchness (*de kho na nyid*) the great bliss (*bde ba chen po*). This work can be considered a Guru Yoga invocation ritual and Great Seal instruction. *Zhang 'gro ba'i mgon po'i gsang ba'i rnam thar bka' rgya las 'phros pa'i gsang ba'i gtam yang dag pa*, continues this topic: the text starts out with a guru yoga on Lama Zhang who is depicted as the Buddha Cakrasaṃvara. Interestingly, passages in this invocation bear similarity to *Zhang bka' rgya'i brgyud rim gsol 'debs*, fol. 1a (p. 894) and are almost identical with a passage in the Eighth Karmapa's *Thun bzhi'i bla ma'i rnal 'byor*.

<sup>183</sup> Williams (1983a: 125) assumes: 'There can be little doubt that Mi bskyod rdo rje was concerned to establish firmly the Abhidharma and Sūtrayāna teachings of the Karma bKa' brgyud in active and crusading opposition to the systematic and sophisticated interpretations dGe lugs pa scholars were presenting.' Although the Karmapa's scholastic aspirations and the debate with Se ra rJe btsun are undoubtable, they may be the sole reason for explicating a commentary issued much later. There can also be some doubt, as to whether the Karmapa's motive was to establish a 'crusading opposition' or whether he was simply debating. It can also be asked why the dGe lugs pa texts are described as 'systematic and sophisticated', suggesting that other schools would not have the capacity for such achievements.

<sup>184</sup> Williams (1983a: 126–127), Brunnhölzl (2004: 553–597).

<sup>185</sup> The Karmapa had visited Atiśa's seat Rwa greng and stayed in the dGe lugs monastery Byams pa gling, where he read the writings of the scholar of Byams pa gling, bSod nams

Major literary works were authored in mTshur phu, where the Karmapa spent the New Year of the ape year (1548). He gave empowerments of the five tantra baskets of the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud lineage and a lengthy treatise on the *yoga-tantras* was completed.<sup>186</sup> Still in mTshur phu, the Karmapa started to compose extensive instructions on the *sKu gsum ngo sprod* (*Pointing out the Three [Buddha] Bodies*).<sup>187</sup> In summary, the 1540s and early 1550s can be considered the mature years of the Eighth Karmapa as author of both tantric and sūtric commentaries.

During these years, the Karmapa continued his travels and occasional political conflicts surfaced.<sup>188</sup> In 1547, when the Rin spungs pa prepared for war in rGyal rtse, the Karmapa issued a letter to prevent them—to no avail. According to *Kaṃ tshang*, in about 1552 sNe'u gdong minister of the Phag mo gru pa asked the Karmapa to pacify fightings in the Yar klung valley and invited the Eighth Karmapa to grant protection.<sup>189</sup> This was probably

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nam rgyal (1401–1475), student of the famed Bo dong Paṇ chen (1376–1451) (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 349; for bSod nams nam rgyal, see Smith 2001: 180). Shortly thereafter, in a retreat of Byams pa gling, the polemics were composed (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gSang sngags snga 'gyur las 'phros pa'i brgal lan*; see also Karmay 1988: 181–182, for the points of critique; see Kapstein 1989: 230, for a further mentioning). The authenticity of the Karmapa's work and its circumstances need to be treated with care: the first lines state (ibid. fol. 1b/p. 351) one of Karmapa's previous critiques to the rNying ma pa was done by someone posing in his name and the Karmapa wishes to clarify the situation (Ringu Tulku 2006: 161 is of the same opinion). The editor of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, Karma bde legs, recounts that according to Sog lzog pa's *Dris lan lung dang rig pa'i 'brug sgra*, the Eighth Karmapa wrote this work in order to motivate the rNying ma pa to study, reflect, and meditate on their own view. Karma bDe legs further mentions stories in the monasteries in Khams about two texts with the name Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje: *rNying ma la rtsod pa mi bskyod dgag yig* and his own answer to that, the *Mi bskyod rang len*. However, the team of Karma bDe legs has found three versions of the text in question: one in 'Bras spungs, one in Nyag rong, and one in Ri bo che (Karma bde legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 48–49).

<sup>186</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 346. The commentary is: Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rNal 'byor kyi rnam par bshad pa thar 'dod grol ste*, 371 fols.

<sup>187</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *sKu gsum ngo sprod kyi rnam par bshad*, colophone in vol. 22, p. 758–759. The colophon mentions sponsorship by a Lha phu ba, who also offered the Karmapa a monastery. The text was completed in 1549 in Thob rGyal dGra 'dul gling in gTsang Zab phu lung. Zab phu lung is an important pilgrimage site of Padmasambhava and known for its hot springs (Dorje 1999: 251). On that occasion the Karmapa also composed ritual for the practice of the female aspect Sitāpatra (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *'Phags pa gtsug gtor gdugs dkar gyi mngon rtogs dang dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*).

<sup>188</sup> His travels included a further visit to 'Jang sa tham in 1552 with the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 348).

<sup>189</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 348.



meant to keep the local lords of the neighbouring Yar klung valley in check and consequently, the Karmapa issued a letter to each of the rulers which led to the successful pacifying of all wars in Yar klung.<sup>190</sup>

#### 4.1.6 Travel to rTsa ri, Sickness, and Passing Away

During his last years, after 1553, the Karmapa made a pilgrimage to rTsa ri, one of Tibet's most revered pilgrimage sites.<sup>191</sup> At first, the deepening of his training is illustrated by the transformation of the ordinary body into the wisdom body (*jñānakāya*) via yogic exercises, accompanied by vast visions of Vajrayoginī and Cakrasaṃvara, Padmasambhava, Lama Zhang, and other Karmapas.<sup>192</sup>

While the Karmapa continued to visit sacred places of the site, various songs of realisation were uttered;<sup>193</sup> the Karmapa composed texts (*thugs brtsams*), and taught the Great Seal. He instructed his disciples gathered at the Bod rdo hot springs (*mthsan khar*) in the meditation instructions for the *rGod tshang pa'i dge sbyor bdun ma'i khrid* (*Seven Applications to Virtue of rGod tshang pa*) and imparted to some monks from dBus ma Brag dkar the meditation instructions of the 'innate union of the Great Seal' (*lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid*) on the basis of a text composed by the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa.<sup>194</sup>

While in rTsa ri, the Karmapa suffered an injury to his right shoulder (*sku dpung*) in the ninth month of the ox year (1553), and indicated that his life was about to end.<sup>195</sup> Due to the Karmapa's sickness, the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa apparently started to take over some responsibilities after the New Year of the tiger year (1554). The political atmosphere was still charged,

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. p. 349.

<sup>191</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 350. Situated near mount Dag pa shel ri, rTsa ri as sacred place was inspired by Phag mo gru pa and gTsang pa rgya re Ye shes rdo rje (1161–1211). It became particularly important for the bKa' brgyud schools and hosts sacred places of one of their essential Buddha aspects, Cakrasaṃvara (Dorje 1999: 224–225). The Karmapa went there after a short visit to the hot springs in Yar 'brog.

<sup>192</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 350. It is also recounted that the Karmapa told stories of his previous life-times (ibid. p. 351).

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. mentions the *bKa' bzhi seng chen ma'i mgur*, which has not yet been found in any of the title lists. In the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, we find a title indicating that this song was composed while he was sick in rTsa ri, Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun mi bskyod rdo rje de nyid dgung lo bzhi bcu zhe bdun pa la tsa ri'i phebs tshun gyi gsung mgur rnams*.

<sup>194</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 351.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

and when armies came to Dwags po from Kong po the Zhwa dmar pa had to reconcile the parties. Meanwhile, the Karmapa's retinue requested their lama to journey to upper rTsa ri, so he proceeded to the area of his fervent supporters in the sKu rab pa family (in Dwags po, Southern Tibet) and then to bShad sgrub gling.<sup>196</sup>

When a dangerous leprosy epidemic broke out in Southern Tibet, its cause was identified as *nāga*-spirit (*klu bdud*).<sup>197</sup> As one of his last deeds, the Karmapa visited those people, who were unable to reach him due to their illness. The ensuing taming of the *nāga* is a metaphor similar to the legend of Padmasambhava subduing the female earth-demon of Tibet for founding of the monastery bSam yas.<sup>198</sup> At the centre of the *nāga* the Karmapa put a temple with a large statue. In the statue's life tree at the heart level he placed some remains of the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakṣi, who was renowned for his magical powers in subduing evil forces.<sup>199</sup> Four black stūpas were then erected to conquer the 'four limbs' (*yan lag*) of the *nāga*. The already-ill Karmapa took the remainder of the epidemic upon himself in order to avert the danger for other beings.<sup>200</sup> Accordingly, in the eighth month of that year, the signs of his sickness increased.<sup>201</sup>

Notably, some of the last instructions the Eighth Karmapa imparted concerned the Great Seal. In the eighth month of that tiger year (1554), due to his sickness, monks invited him from gSang sngags gling to come on a palanquin and the Karmapa prayed for the local population's swift healing from the epidemic. He taught meditation instructions of the Great Seal (*phyag chen gyi khrid*) to those carrying the palanquin. Proceeding to bSam sde, his health briefly improved and he again performed certain sermons.<sup>202</sup>

<sup>196</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 352. The last documented work the Karmapa composed in the seventh lunar month of that year was a ritual describing the consecration of one hundred and eight stūpas connected to the Buddha aspect (*vid dam*) Uṣṇīṣa-sitātapatra (*gtsug gtor gdugs dkar*); it was probably composed in sKu rab: Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gTsug gtor dri med nas gsungs pa'i mchod rten brgya rtsa brgyad mchod pa'i cho ga*, 28 fols. The place was the palace of sKu rab of the king (*sa skyong*) of the Eastern part of Tibet (ibid. fol. 28a/p. 711).

<sup>197</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 353.

<sup>198</sup> Blondeau and Gyatso (2003: 17), Kapstein (2006b: 70). For an assessment of the various theories about the supine demoness and an account of its geomantic underpinnings, see Mills (2007: 1–4); for the concept of taming the local powers of Tibet, see also Samuel (1993: 169).

<sup>199</sup> Kapstein (2000: 97–106); Thinley (1980: 52).

<sup>200</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 353.

<sup>201</sup> The sources use the Tibetan words *tshul* or *rnam pa* for the sickness, indicating that he rather 'showed' sickness or appeared to be sick than being sick in a conventional sense.

<sup>202</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 353.

After a vision of the siddha Birvapa and prophecies (related in *Kaṃ tshang*) about the next rebirth, the Karmapa passed away in his forty-eighth year, around noon of the twenty-third day in the eighth month of the tiger year (1554).<sup>203</sup>

The body (*sku gdung*) of the deceased master was brought to mTshur phu.<sup>204</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che made offerings for the completion of his master's activity (*dgongs rdzogs*) and the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa had been made the Karmapa's successor and regent (*rgyal tshab*).<sup>205</sup> These two were the Eighth Karmapa's most important successors.<sup>206</sup>

#### 4.2 The Eighth Karmapa: 'Learned and Accomplished One' of his Day

The spiritual biographies and memoirs portray the Eighth Karmapa after the ideal of a 'learned and accomplished one' (*mkhas sgrub*), an accomplished scholar and realised meditator, an ideal characteristic for important religious hierarchs in late medieval Tibet.<sup>207</sup> The scholastic, yogic, and political roles embodied by the Karmapa are represented in the sources from the outset.

Three centuries earlier, sGam po pa had exemplified the monasticisation of lay tantric lineages within the bKa' brgyud schools in the twelfth cen-

<sup>203</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355, describes his death 'showing the way of gathering the mandala of an emanation' (*sprul sku'i dkyil 'khor bsdu ba'i tshul bstan*). Shortly before, the Karmapa had predicted his next rebirth, a feature peculiar to spiritual biographies of incarnate lamas. *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355, explains that he put the prophecy into writing but did not relate it to his attendants (*sku 'khor*) directly. The last place mentioned is a g.Yag sde monastery, which is probably not the g.Yag sde in gTsang (ibid. 253).

<sup>204</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355; receptacles of his body and speech were erected at other places, too (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1324). Most Tibetan Buddhist traditions consider the body of a deceased master to be an object of veneration and a source of relics (Martin 1994: 1).

<sup>205</sup> Martin (1994: 4) has rendered the term *ren* as 'receptacle'; it may alternatively be translated as 'support, dependency, container'. Central to the idea of the 'three receptacles' of body, speech, and mind of a Buddha or a saint is their ability to convey blessing or spiritual influence (*byin rlabs*).

<sup>206</sup> *Kaṃ tshang* p. 337. For the student lists see also *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 356; *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1332–33; they also include the respective rGyal tshab Grags pa dpal 'byor and Si tu Chos kyi 'od zer. *Kaṃ tshang* (p. 356) distinguished into students who 'uphold the teaching of exposition and practice' (*bshad sgrub kyi bstan pa 'dzin pa*), who are 'endowed with realisation' (*rtogs ldan*) and those in 'whose [mind] the blessing has entered and who [successfully] practice service [to the teacher]' (*byin rlabs zhugs shing zhabs tog bsgrub pa*).

<sup>207</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 231 and 2000: 19).

tury.<sup>208</sup> From then on, Tibetan Buddhism tended to unite Buddhist tantrism with Mahāyāna monasticism, though different schools often kept particular tendencies coloured by their main origin.<sup>209</sup> The Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje, can be seen as a role model and the starting point of the Karma bKa' brgyud scholastic systematisation.<sup>210</sup> And it is the Third Karmapa who is a recurring theme that connects the Eighth Karmapa to his possible role model as Karma bKa' brgyud scholar.<sup>211</sup> While the Eighth Karmapa was a Great Seal yogin and teacher of mysticism, he was by no means a representative of the fifteenth-century *smyon pa* phenomenon prevalent among the bKa' brgyud traditions: 'holy madmen' such as gTsang smyon He ru ka, dBus smyon Kun dga' bzang po (1458–1532), and 'Brug smyon Kun dga' legs pa (1455–1529), formed a counterpart to the scholastic monks' hereditary religious nobility.<sup>212</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa was seen to embody various roles. One of these was the incarnate lama. Rooted with the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage of the thirteenth century, the incarnation system had become formalised, freeing monastic orders from the institution of family inheritance. The system was

<sup>208</sup> Sherpa (2004: 79–94); Samuel (1993: 479–481).

<sup>209</sup> Samuel (1993: 3–24) introduces the terms 'shamanic and clerical Buddhism' and explains different attempts at synthesis such as the bKa' brgyud pa, dGe lug pa, and the nineteenth century *ris med* movement.

<sup>210</sup> For scholastic traditions, the fourteenth-century systematisation was the work of successive masters of the gSang phu and Sa skya. Scholars such as Klong chen Rab 'byams pa (1308–1363) (see Kapstein 2000: 97–105), Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361), and the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), were influenced by these traditions in developing their peculiar interpretations (for the Third Karmapa, see Schaeffer 1995: 6–25 and 72–110). The Sixth Karmapa, mThong ba don ldan (1416–1453), received most of his scholastic teaching from the famed Sa skya pa master Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367–1449), who, along with the gSang phu traditions, constituted a major source of the Karma bKa' brgyud sūtra exegesis (Brunnhölzl 2004: 19; for Śākya mchog ldan's education with Rong ston, see Caumanns 2006: 65–68). There were also masters more skeptical of scholastic ideas, such as the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakṣi (1206–1283), or the 'Bri gung 'Jigs ten dgon po (this is the thesis of Kapstein 2000: 101–106).

<sup>211</sup> The Third Karmapa is mentioned as a reference in the instructions the Eighth Karmapa received (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar rje nyid kyi rnam thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa*, fol. 3b (p. 335); see translation above, 121).

<sup>212</sup> Smith (2001: 59ff); Stein (1993: 170 ff.). Kögler (2004: 25–55) suggest social factors such as the absence of central political authority and the important role of the clergy. The *smyon pa* exemplified a return to the roots of the bKa' brgyud traditions: the close connection to the teacher, oral instructions, and meditation in solitude. Some are mentioned among the disciples of the Seventh Karmapa as 'kings of the yogis' (Skt. *yogeśvara*) (*Kaṃ tshang*, 1972 edition, p. 592). The spiritual biography of 'Brug smyon Kun dga' legs pa mentions that 'Brug smyon met the Eighth Karmapa and discovered him to be briefly distracted from his vows, which the Karmapa then confirmed (Dowman 1980: 230).

an innovation with advantages and problems, the latter clearly visible in the case of the Eighth Karmapa's selection. Families and monasteries were keen on having one of 'their' members obtain the title of a great reincarnate, a denomination cherished for its socio-political advantages.<sup>213</sup> On the other hand, the incarnation system provided security for the growth of scholasticism and was favoured by the secular rulers.<sup>214</sup> What, almost inevitably, followed was the involvement of religious hierarchs in political affairs, including the seeking of funding from wealthy and powerful patrons, who in turn aimed for dominance over a particular area of Tibet.

However, perhaps the most striking role the Karmapa held for his Karma bKa' brgyud tradition was that of the Buddhist scholar. The politics of reincarnation immersed the boy at an early age, and the five year old Karmapa reacted by resolving to seek out a genuine teacher and to study diligently. With regard to his studies, scholastic accomplishments, and the founding of institutes, the Eighth Karmapa continued the aims of his predecessor, the Seventh Karmapa, and tried to raise the educational standard of the Karma bKa' brgyud.<sup>215</sup> Both scholars of the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition and the number of his writings lend support to this claim.<sup>216</sup> In sheer number, they may be compared to those of Śākya mChog Idan

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<sup>213</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 105, 109). Wylie (1978: 581–582) argues that the concept of reincarnation *de facto* emerged with the Third Karmapa at the time of Mongol supremacy in order to replace the 'Khon family. It had the advantage of being free from patrimonial connections and a 'charisma of office'. Samuel (1993: 495–497) explains the concept of reincarnation emerging with the bKa' brgyud pa during the Mongol period as a political device, that would bring political and economical advantages to monasteries.

<sup>214</sup> According to Samuel (1993: 497) it was a method for synthesising the monk and shaman ideals. The dGe lugs pa quickly adopted the incarnation model and their two reincarnate lamas, the Dalai Lama and Paṇ chen Lama dominated Tibetan politics from the seventeenth century onwards (ibid. chapter 26).

<sup>215</sup> For the monasteries and centres of learning founded, see *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 10b–11b (p. 369–371). While the dGe lugs monastic education focused more on debate, the non dGe lugs schools developed commentarial schools (*bshad grwa*) stressing exegesis. This development took place after the fifteenth century (Dreyfus 2005a: 276–292). In general, one must distinguish between a lineage of spiritual instructions, passed down from teacher to student, and a religious school, which is an organised form of the studies and practices connected with a particular transmission lineage (Kapstein 1980: 139; 1995: 284, n. 2).

<sup>216</sup> mKhan po Nges don considered it a particular feature of the Eighth Karmapa, that he spread the doctrine mainly through *mchad nyan*, e.g. exposition and study of the Buddha's teaching (as practised in Tibet) (oral communication, March 2007).

(twenty-four volumes) and, most importantly, 'Brug chen Padma dKar po (twenty-four volumes).<sup>217</sup>

His scholastic proficiency is corroborated by a spiritual memoir: he mainly taught the five topics, e.g. Abhidharma, Pramāṇa, Prajñāpāramitā, and Madhyamaka, augmented by Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Tshad ma rigs gter*, the *sDom gsum rab dbye*, and the trainings of the Vinaya.<sup>218</sup> Further, he gave instructions on the view of Madhyamaka (*dbu ma'i lta khrid*) and explanations of the *Zab mo nang gi don*, the treatises of Maitreya and the scholastic corpus (*rigs tshogs*) of Nāgārjuna.<sup>219</sup> While scholastically challenging and using strong language in some of his writings, the summary of the Eighth Karmapa's life reveals his keen interest in different traditions of learning, as well as humbler overtones.<sup>220</sup> The Karmapa's intellectual engagement culminated in the composition of large scholastic treatises, the pinnacle of which was his Madhyamaka commentary. In it he explored the language of his opponents and the tools of Buddhist logic to the fullest, yet, he was clearly sceptical of overanalysing.<sup>221</sup>

This commentary and other writings were partially inspired by the Great Seal of the crazy yogin type Lama Zhang (or his writings), indicating the Karmapa's core inspiration in even the most scholastic of undertakings: teacher and transmitter of the Great Seal. Passages examined above account for his study and realisation of the Great Seal: his training under Sangs rgyas mnyan pa, and the tales of his realisation are woven into the narratives and illustrated with the usual visions and songs. They culminate in yogic practices in the last year of his life (1554) in rTsa ri. His yogic understanding is portrayed in dialogues as early as 1512 up to his final teaching of Great Seal instructions in 1554.

The Eighth Karmapa inherited political problems from his predecessor and had to deal with various conflicting interests. In the atmosphere of

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<sup>217</sup> Śākya mchog ldan, gSer mdog Paṇ chen, *The Complete Works*; Padma dkar po, *Collected works (gsung 'bum)*. Padma dkar po can be considered the central Great Seal exegete of the sixteenth century next to the Eighth Karmapa. A study of their political relation and a comparison of their doctrines is an object for future research.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. fol. 9b (p. 367).

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> The Eighth Karmapa's straightforward language is indicated at other occasions: around 1539, the Karmapa met Jo nang Kun dga' sgrol mchog (1507–1565/1566), a famed Jo nang pa master. This would have been his disciple prophesised as 'sun like', but the Karmapa used a few straightforward words in typical Khams pa fashion, the student ran away (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 342). The reason of not going to China has shown more personal traits, too.

<sup>221</sup> Williams (1983a: 129).

mounting tensions between dBus and gTsang and a developing sectarianism,<sup>222</sup> the Karmapa established ties with local rulers and kings, attaining a relatively dominant position for his school in Eastern Tibet, as well as in dBus and gTsang, though he held no formal political post. He had further established a patron-priest connection with the non-Tibetan kings of 'Jang Sa tham and Mon and was not only sponsored by the Rin spungs pa regents and the Bya, Yar klung, and Dwags po sku rab lords, but had developed closer ties to the resurgent Phag mo gru rulers than was previously assumed.<sup>223</sup> According to the sources, the Karmapa tried to appease various feuds and, though he was certainly politically involved, an attitude of scepticism is visible.

Sources are, on the whole, negative about the political state of affairs of the day. Though in a letter to the Phag mo gru ruler the Eighth Karmapa alluded positively to the patron-priest relationship at the time of the early Tibetan kings, most contemporary involvements were definitely not considered a Buddhist virtue.<sup>224</sup> Sangs rgya dpal grub, for instance, explains that people in Kong po, as in dBus and gTsang, behaved like animals, killing each other.<sup>225</sup>

Sangs rgyas dpal grub further criticises the state of monastic discipline (*tshul khrims*) and the liberating influence the Karmapa had on those entangled in conflict and the 'ocean of dispute' (*rtsod pa'i rgya mtsho*).<sup>226</sup> He explains that the dGe lugs pa and the Karma bKa' brgyud pa were not in accordance. The main reasons were not, as had been assumed frequently, doctrinal differences but the founding of the monasteries of Yangs pa can

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<sup>222</sup> Dreyfus (2005a: 296). According to Dreyfus (ibid. 293–297) up to the second half of the fifteenth century the differences in the scholastic curricula were not reflections of sectarian differences but merely styles of teaching.

<sup>223</sup> Apart from the connections mentioned in the first sections of the chapter, the Karmapa mentions having passed the *upāsaka* vows to the Phag gru and Bya pa lords (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* fol. 12b/p. 373). Verhufen (1995: 40) has correctly evaluated the Eighth Karmapa's position of strength due to his Rin spungs pa support, but did not remark much about his connection to the Phag mo gru pa who regained some strength after the 1520s.

<sup>224</sup> The letter is *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *Bod rgyal po chen po'i rgyal thabs kyi mdzad pa gtam du byas pa sne'u sdong rgyal po la gnang ba rin po che'i phreng ba'o* (see also above, 141, n. 164).

<sup>225</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 37b (p. 223).

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. fol. 38a (p. 224).

(1503) in north-west gTsang and Thub chen (1498) east of Lhasa.<sup>227</sup> This supports the thesis of geo-strategical issues being the cause of conflict rather than doctrinal differences.<sup>228</sup> The Karmapa's position did not go unchallenged among the dGe lugs pa only: some Sa skya monasteries in gTsang were unhappy with the Karma bKa' brgyud pa's disproportionate influence,<sup>229</sup> and some saw the Karmapa's humility as a sign of subordination.<sup>230</sup>

### 4.3 *Spiritual Programme for Teaching Meditation*

Chapter Two has shown that the Great Seal is not usually an instruction given to beginners. What, then, did the Karmapa emphasise when guiding his students on the Buddhist path? What role did the Great Seal play in his writings and teaching?

The Eighth Karmapa's spiritual memoirs and biographies suggest he stressed the 'graded path of the three kinds of individuals' (*skyes bo gsum gyi lam rim*) when instructing students in meditation.<sup>231</sup> He reports in 1534

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. fol. 37b (p. 223). It is interesting to note that Sangs rgyas dpal grub attributes the founding of Thub chen to the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa whereas other sources claim that the Seventh Karmapa founded this monastery.

<sup>228</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 130).

<sup>229</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 38b (p. 225). In his poetic travel journal *Rang gi rtogs brjod lam glu dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i dga' ston*, Tshar chen Blo gsal rgya mtsho (1502–1566), a tantric master of the Sa skya tradition, although he did not meet the Karmapa in person, heavily complains about the Eighth Karmapa's behaviour and doctrines, calling his commentaries 'impure and corrupt' (*ma gstan ba myog zhig*) refusing to pay taxes to the Karmapa's patron, the Rin spungs pa. See Cyrus Stearns, *Song of the Road: The Poetic Travel Journal of Tsarchen Losal Gyatso* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 112. This passage in full in Tibetan and English translation: ibid. 111–115 (translation); discussion on page 13 (introduction). Tshar chen's claims about the scholastic defects are not substantiated. Stearns remarks that these criticisms may also be the result of the Karmapa's accusations against the rNying ma pa (ibid. 13 and 20, n. 13). A prior critique by the Eighth Karmapa of the rNying ma, however, may be forged as discussed in the opening of *gSang sngags snga 'gyur las 'phros pa'i brgal lan rtsod pa med pa'i ston pa dang bstan pa'i byung ba brjod pa drang po'i sa bon* attributed to Mi bskyod rdo rje (see also Ringu Tulku 2006: 161). These complex relationships and their historical contexts need to be further explored in future research. The issue of the rNying ma pa polemics and possible forgeries will be discussed in my forthcoming publication about the origin and transmission of Mi bskyod rdo rje's *gsung 'bum*.

<sup>230</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 38b (p. 225).

<sup>231</sup> Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*, the earliest template for the Tibetan graded path, distinguishes three types of practitioners: those of lower and middling spiritual aspirations strive for happiness in this life (i) or their personal liberation from cyclic existence (ii), while those of the highest capacity tread the Bodhisattva path and thus belong to the Mahāyāna (iii).



that his main teacher, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa, urged him that from his eighteenth year on he should teach the sūtra approach to his disciples, and the Karmapa, according to the memoir, adhered to that advice.<sup>232</sup> When it comes to the meditation instructions (*khrid*) taught, a further spiritual memoir confirms the importance assigned to the graded path system of Atiśa: mind training (*blo shyang*) and tantric instructions such as the empowerments and explanations of Nāropa's doctrines were employed 'according to necessity'.<sup>233</sup> But he mainly (*gtso bor*) taught the graded path of the three kinds of individuals, with the aid of Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*.<sup>234</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* underlines this hypothesis.<sup>235</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa's meditation instructions corroborate the statements and are concerned with this topic either explicitly or implicitly. The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa had, for example, incorporated the *Skyes bu gsum gyi lam rim bsds pa'i khrid* (*Instruction which Summarises the Graded Path of the Three [Kinds of] Individuals*) within the rubric of instructions where 'the dharma becomes the path', the second of the Four Dharmas of sGam po pa.<sup>236</sup> The text consists of stepwise instructions on meditation: explaining bodily posture, taking refuge, *bodhicitta*, remembering the teacher,

Graded path commentaries often conclude with a brief section on Buddhist tantra (Jackson, D. 1996: 230). A later example of this genre is Tsong kha pa's *Lam rim chen mo* (see also Wayman 1978). sGam po pa's famed graded teaching, too, though not modelled after this system, refers to the three kinds of individuals (sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen, *Dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*, p. 211).

<sup>232</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*.

<sup>233</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4a–fol. 9b (pp. 357–367) outlines the texts which the Eighth Karmapa wrote up to his forty-fourth year and *ibid.* fol. 9b ff. (p. 367) relates how he directly expounded (*bshad*) on these texts. This point is subdivided into how he spread the monasteries (*sde*) for the saṅgha, the expository colleges (*bshad grwa*), and ordered the three bases (*rten gsum*) for enlightened body, speech, and mind.

<sup>234</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b (p. 367). For a translation of the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, see Eimer (1978) and Davidson (1995). For Atiśa's works see Sherburne (1983). The importance of this work for the genre of the graded path has been noted by Jackson, D. (1995: 230). Nowhere does the Eighth Karmapa mention sGam po pa's *Thar rgyan* (*Ornament of Liberation*). This might be precisely because it belongs—as Jackson indicates—to the graded teaching (*bstan rim*) genre, which Jackson defines as related, but slightly different, from that of the graded path (*ibid.* 229).

<sup>235</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1324–25, states that the Karmapa expounded the great treatises of sūtra and mantra, mainly using the graded path of the bKa' gdams pa, as a means for turning the students' minds toward the dharma and letting the dharma become the path, inciting renunciation and compassion.

<sup>236</sup> *dKar chag*, fol. 12a (p. 22). Among other instructions categorised under the first two dharmas of sGam po pa, there are many more who touch on related topics, such as contemplation of impermanence, compassion, and the like.

calming the mind, and finally the meditation on essencelessness (Skt. *anātman*). The Karmapa's concern for placing the Great Seal in the context of the practice of teachings is evident from certain passages in the *Phyag rgya chen po zhi gnas kyi khrid*, where—though the Great Seal is mentioned—emphasis is on graded teachings.<sup>237</sup>

Adherence to Atiśa's system is not unusual, given its introduction into the lineage through sGam po pa and widespread popularity in the whole of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>238</sup> The Eighth Karmapa's explicit usage of Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*, however, is worth noting: nowhere does he talk of the standard graded teaching attributed to sGam po pa, the *Thar rgyan*. This expression of reverence for the old bKa' gdams pa masters is in line with the favour with which he speaks of them in his Madhyamaka commentary.<sup>239</sup> One spiritual memoir notes that tantric instructions, including the one intention of the 'Bri gung bKa' bgyud pa, lineage holders on pure appearances, renunciation, devotion, and enlightened attitude were taught as a 'background' (*rgyab*) for the graded path teachings.<sup>240</sup>

Genuine exposition of the Buddhist tantras was apparently restricted to small groups of students. According to a spiritual memoir, the Eighth Karmapa's teacher Sangs rgyas mnyan pa ordered him to teach only a little of the graded tantra path (*gsang sngags lam gyi rim pa*) from his twenty-seventh year onwards.<sup>241</sup> Consequently, the Karmapa taught it to some restricted individuals, while remaining sceptical of the more 'public' empowerments.<sup>242</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che supports this claim, saying that to

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<sup>237</sup> See, for example, the passage quoted in Chapter Five (5.1): Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po zhi gnas kyi khrid*, fol. 4a (p. 175) and Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kam tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 1b (p. 958). Starting with basic capacity he defines contemplation of death and impermanence as essential, for without these ones would cheat oneself with the mere semblance of dharma. He then goes on to describe cause and effect.

<sup>238</sup> See Sherpa (2004: 17–94 and esp. 91–94) for sGam po pa's life and an introduction of bKa' gdams pa teachings.

<sup>239</sup> See Williams (1983a: 129), for the Karmapa's approval of the bKa' gdams as found in his *Dwags*; he does not take issue with those masters but rather with Tsong kha pa's interpretation of them; see Brunnhözl (2004: 553–97), for the differences between the Eighth Karmapa's and Tsong kha pa's interpretations of Madhyamaka.

<sup>240</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b (p. 367).

<sup>241</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nam thar*, fol. 6af (p. 340f).

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 6b (p. 341); the statement is translated in the introduction to this chapter. One needs to take into account that this source stems from the year 1534, meaning the twenty-seventh year of the Eighth Karmapa, marking the start of his tantric teaching, had just begun.

worthy students the Karmapa taught the extraordinary Vajrayāna-instructions, stages, and visualisations.<sup>243</sup> That stated, it seems the Karmapa imparted instructions resembling the Great Seal or tantric meditations before the age of twenty-seven (though these do not necessarily fit with the idea of exposition of the tantras).<sup>244</sup> And despite the claim of restricted exposition of the tantras, most of the Eighth Karmapa's meditation instructions found in his writings are devoted to instruction on tantric completion stage practices and the subtle energy systems.<sup>245</sup>

What do the Karmapa's spiritual memoirs say about his teaching of the Great Seal proper? When enumerating the Great Seal instructions (*phyag chen gyi khrid*) he imparted, the Eighth Karmapa begins with those bKa' brgyud pa transmissions that he had formerly practised: Karma, 'Brug pa, 'Ba rom pa, 'Bri gung, mTshal pa, sMar pa, and Khro phu. He then claims that he particularly emphasised the meditation instructions on the bKa' brgyud traditions, such as the one of Jo bo Mitrayogin and the Great Seal of the *dohās* which was transmitted in India by Vajrapāṇi.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1324 ff. Here, the number of disciples who received true tantric instructions is depicted as more numerous than in the spiritual memoir, likely caused by either its later composition or the usual element of idealisation encountered in such accounts.

<sup>244</sup> For example, the dialogues analysed in Chapter Five (5.2.1–5.3.1). mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, March 2007) explained that 'exposition of the secret mantra' (*gsang sngags mchad nyan*) would not refer to meditation instructions (*khrid*), question and answer texts (*dris lan*) or simple empowerments (*dbang*). In his view, the term denotes only extensive explanations on the tantras. The Great Seal of the Innate Union (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor*) would also not belong to this category, as it blends both sūtra and tantra. The Eighth Karmapa's spiritual memoir *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 10a (p. 368), lists tantric explanations (*bshad pa*) on the creation and completion stages, such as the Five stages of Cakrasaṃvara and Guhyasamāja and the six yogas of Kālacakra, including an oral transmission of sGam po pa (*sgam po snyan rgyud*) and the secret teachings of Lama Zhang (*zhang bka' rgya ma*). Most important empowerments such as the Kālacakra, the various traditions of Cakrasaṃvara, and the ocean of *ḍākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro rgya mtsho*) are also listed.

<sup>245</sup> The major part (both in terms of titles and pages) of volumes twenty to twenty-five, among the section of instructions (*khrid dang man ngag*), deal with instructions such as the secret teachings of Lama Zhang (*zhang bka' rgya ma*) and the Great Seal in its tantric context. Alone, volumes twenty-one and twenty-two are dedicated to the *sKu gsum ngo sprod*, and twenty-three makes up the *rLung sems gnyis med* (*Differentiating Energy-Wind and Mind*) (see also Chapter Three (3.3)). Though the extent to which a certain kind of instruction is accounted for may not inform how often a meditation was actually taught, it still has some value.

<sup>246</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b (p. 367). After the previously mentioned sūtric, tantric, and Great Seal instructions the text continues adding the vows, the recitation of Avalokiteśvara, and various reading transmissions (*lung*) of the sūtra treatises. According

The written works do not fully reflect this claim. For example, the shorter instructions in volume nineteen bear testimony to the numerous Great Seal transmissions listed by the Karmapa: approaches range from the 'Brug pa Great Seal of rGyal ba yang dgon pa (1213–1258), the Great Seal of 'O rgyan pa called 'the six cycles of equal taste' (*ro snyoms skor drug*), the fivefold Great Seal of the 'Bri gung pa and, naturally, the Great Seal of the Karma bKa' brgyud pa.<sup>247</sup> But only one instruction mentions Mitra-yogin<sup>248</sup> and there is no formal instruction or commentary on Saraha's *dohā*.<sup>249</sup>

There are some likely interpretations of the passage above from the Eighth Karmapa's spiritual memoir. Noting that he emphasised the approach of the *dohā* may well refer to teaching a direct approach to the realisation of mind, the essence of the Great Seal. One finds Saraha abundantly quoted, and the importance of both Maitrīpa and Saraha is also

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to 'Gos Lo tsā ba, Vajrapāṇi (born 1017) was key for transmitting the Great Seal in Tibet in what he calls the upper translation (*stod 'gyur*) of the intermediate period (Roerich 1996: 860) and played a major part in bringing Saraha's *Treasury of Doha Verses* (*Dohā mdzod kyi glu*) to Tibet (Roerich 1996: 839–866; Schaeffer 2000: 125–127; Karma 'phrin las pa I, Phyogs las mnam rgyal, *Do ha skor gsum gyi ṭika 'bring po*, p. 11–12). One of Vajrapāṇi's most important sources of transmission was Bal po Asu, alias Skye med bde chen (see Schaeffer 2000: 123–131, for a more detailed account; and also Karma 'phrin las pa's *Do hā skor gsum gyi ṭika 'bring po*, which is a major historical source).

<sup>247</sup> For the Great Seal of Yang dgon pa, see *rGyal ba yang dgon pa'i ngo sprod bdun ma'i khrid yig*; instructions on the fivefold Great Seal of the 'Bri gung are *lNga ldan tshogs su bsgom pa'i cho ga* and *Phyag rgya chen po lnga ldan gyi khrid*; works teaching the Great Seal of the siddha 'O rgyan pa are *rJe rgod tshang ba'i ro snyoms sgang dril* and *Mos gus phyag chen gyi khrid zab mo rgyal ba rgod tshang pa'i lugs* (all texts by Karmapa VIII, Mi bskyod rdo rje). Instructions about the Great Seal of sGam po pa are *sGam po'i lugs kyi phyag rgya chen po* and *sGam po pa'i lhan cig skyes sbyor bskyang thabs shin tu zab mo*.

<sup>248</sup> Among the meditation instructions it is the Eighth Karmapa's *sNying po don gsum gyi don khrid*, a guided meditation on Avalokiteśvara, which contains a reference to this master. It describes how to accumulate mantras and purify veils (*gsags sbyong*), e.g. how to practice the two stages of tantric meditation. This is followed by instructions on the view and meditation. The Karmapa was urged by some students to write this instruction and did so—showing the skill of sGam po pa. On fol. 3a (p. 538) Mitrayogin is mentioned and on fol. 9a (p. 550) his theory is quoted when the perception of emptiness in meditation and post-meditation is discussed. Mitrayogin was connected to the transmission of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet and his Great Seal was called 'cutting the stream of *samsāra*' (*'khor ba rgyun chod*). See Roerich (1996:1030–43, Book XIV 'The Cycle of Mahākaruṇika and that of the Vajrāvali'), for an account of Mitrayogin. Van der Kuijp (1994: fn. 14) has listed a further five Tibetan sources on his life found in the Tibetan Library in Beijing. Mitrayogin was a contemporary of the thirteenth-century Indian Paṇḍit Śākyaśrībhadrā and teacher of Khro pu Lo tsā ba Byams pa dpal (1172–1236).

<sup>249</sup> See the second case study in Chapter Five.

clearly acknowledged in his *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.<sup>250</sup> And both claims may refer to orally-imparted instructions; the value attached to oral pith instructions, and the significant role of the teacher transmitting such instructions being a significant issue in the transmission of meditative practices within Tibetan religious traditions.

It is evident that, despite the normative appeal of secrecy and orality, a bulk of these so-called 'oral' instructions was put into writing.<sup>251</sup> Still, many written practices are designed to be commented on by a teacher. Despite the Eighth Karmapa's call for assembling and taking care of his work,<sup>252</sup> and the huge amount of texts collected, the texts cannot document every instance of teaching. Thus, the Eighth Karmapa's statement in the spiritual memoir can still make a valid point for understanding his emphasis in transmitting the Great Seal.<sup>253</sup>

This chapter has introduced the Eighth Karmapa's life outlining the main formative events of the Eighth Karmapa's religious career, his scholastic contributions and his political relations. It was shown, how his life was pervaded by training and teaching the Great Seal, and how he became one of the greatest scholars in his tradition. Despite involvement in the politics of the day with both the Rin spungs pa and the Phag mo gru pa, along with local lords such as the sKu rab pa and Yar klung nobles, his sceptical attitude towards the religio-political atmosphere of his time became evident.

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<sup>250</sup> See for example in the second case study in Chapter Five and its notes. In the *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6a (p. 11), the Eighth Karmapa also approves of the system of alikakāra-cittamātra-Madhyamaka taught by the Indian Vajrapāṇi as an approach to the Great Seal (see Chapter Six); see also Ruegg (1988: 1248ff.); Brunnhölzl (2004: 52); Sherpa (2004: 172).

<sup>251</sup> The *lam 'bras* instructions central to the Sa skya pa tantric practices, and the vajra verses (*rdo rje tshig rkang*) containing them, were put into writing despite claims that they should not be. During the period of the second Ngor abbot Mus pa chen po dKon mchog rgyal mtshan (1388–1469, Jackson, D. 1989b: 52 supposes he held the abbot position 1456–61), who was held in high esteem by all Sa skya pas, the term *lam 'bras slob bshad*, 'explanations for disciples', appeared for the first time. It involves especially secret instructions which had already existed but were only intended for selected students. The more accessible elucidations were named *tshogs bshad*, 'explanations for the gathering' (Stearns 2001: 39–45, see *ibid.* also for a discussion regarding details of the *slob bshad* and *tshogs bshad*).

<sup>252</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 352.

<sup>253</sup> See Graham (1987: 67–79) for the scripture as spoken word, which he calls the 'Indian Paradigm' and which is reflected in the Tibetan concept of 'transmission through reading' (*lung*). Klein and Wangyal (2006: 11–13) have illustrated with a Bon po text the importance of seeing the context of meditation and education for examining instructions.

The path for the three kinds of individuals was a central topic of the Karmapa's spiritual programme for teaching meditation, reflecting a general 'mainstream monastic outline'.<sup>254</sup> The tantric teachings were apparently passed only to a few worthy students, despite the fact that the main portion of the Karmapa's instructions is devoted to such topics.

It then showed the breadth of his Great Seal instructions and suggested on the basis of spiritual memoirs, that the Eighth Karmapa placed emphasis on the teachings of Saraha's *dohā*, transmitted in India by Vajrapāṇi, and on the Great Seal of Mitrayogin.

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<sup>254</sup> Davidson (1995: 293).



## Chapter 5

### Case Studies of the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal

[I] do not keep even the refuge-vows and do not meditate on death and impermanence for a single session. [But, I] say: '[I] meditate on the Great Seal right away!' [Lama], please consider me fool with compassion!<sup>1</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa

The previous chapter has documented how the Eighth Karmapa studied and practised the Great Seal; and analysed its place in his over-all programme of teaching meditation. How then did this prolific scholar and meditation master teach the Great Seal directly to specific students? Some of the related questions one might raise are: how do the contexts of genre and addressee influence the teaching of Great Seal meditation practice? Do the instructions contain any fixed doctrine? How does the Great Seal fit into the historical and doctrinal contexts of the Eighth Karmapa's life and works?

To examine how the Eighth Karmapa taught the Great Seal to specific students, some so-called 'instruction texts' are analysed in three in-depth case studies.<sup>2</sup> To that end, it discusses the genres in question, selects specific sources, and suggests a scheme of analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the concluding verse of the Eighth Karmapa's *Instruction on the Great Seal [and] Calm Abiding (śamatha) Meditation*; Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po zhi gnas kyi khrid*, fol. 4a (p. 175): *skyabs 'gro tsam gyi bslab bya mi bsrung zhing/ 'chi ba mi rtag thun gcig mi bsgom par/ da lta nyid du phyag chen bsgoms zhes pa/ /blun po'i rang bzhin bdag la thugs rjes gzigs/*.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the value these genres have for the study of the Great Seal, the idea to select what one may call 'marginal texts' (in that they are not used frequently by the tradition nowadays) was partly inspired by ideas of New Historicism (see Schmitz 2002: 175–92, for a description of New Historicism as applied to classical Greek texts). The discussion of Tibetan instruction texts, or so-called 'orally determined genres' was recently taken up by Dan Martin in 'The book-moving incident of 1209', in *Edition, éditions: l'écrit au Tibet, évolution et devenir*, ed. A. Chayet, C. Scherrer-Schaub, F. Robin, and J.-L. Achard (München: Indus Verlag, 2010), 197–217 and Marta Sernesi, 'The Collected Sayings of the



### 5.1 Case Studies: Concrete Examples of Teaching the Great Seal

The criteria for selecting some of the Eighth Karmapa's texts for the case studies are based on content (the Great Seal or teachings which can be grouped as 'spontaneous Buddhism'),<sup>3</sup> religious function (instruction on view or meditation), form (shorter and concise texts from respective genre), and intended audience, e.g. the addressee in the given teaching situation (a specific group or one student).

The religious function can apply to various genres: spiritual instructions (*gdams ngag*), esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), questions and answers (*dris lan*), meditation instructions (*khrid*), pieces of advice (*bslab bya*), spiritual songs (*mgur*), letters (*'phring yig*), epistles (*chab shog*), and sometimes evocation rituals (*sgrub thabs*). Religious function could also refer to clearly defined passages in other texts, for example songs (*mgur*), questions and answers (*dris lan*), or passages directly teaching meditation and embedded in a spiritual biography (*rnam thar*).<sup>4</sup> Here, those texts teaching meditation of the Great Seal are examined, which address a particular person or group of persons and, more precisely, a person who has a specific question (or wish) about Great Seal view and practice. The orientation is thus the intended audience of the teaching.<sup>5</sup>

The case studies investigate works from three genres, which have been discussed previously: dialogues in a spiritual biography, question and answer texts, and meditation instructions related genres (*khrid*, *man ngag*, *bslab bya*). The main rubrics and questions for the examination are: (i) the

master: oral and written transmissions and the authority of tradition,' *JIABS* 36–37/1–2 (2013, 2014, 2015), 459–489.

<sup>3</sup> Beyer (1975: 148).

<sup>4</sup> One may argue that other texts, such as the larger commentaries or scholastic treatises, teach the Great Seal and its practice. Their general outlook and style, however, is different. It is assumed that they are not intended to be a direct meditation instruction. Nevertheless, often the larger treatises such as the Madhyamaka commentary are vital for communicating the view (*lta ba*), often considered the necessary background for effective meditation (*sgom pa*). Many Buddhist traditions argue that view and meditation (*sgom pa*) cannot be separated (Bielefeldt 2005: 236–240).

<sup>5</sup> This excludes, for example, the meditation manuals (*khrid yig*) written for larger audiences such as sGam po pa bKra shis nman rgyal's *Phyag chen zla ba'i 'od zer* and also the manuals of the Ninth Karmapa (dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX, *Lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi zab khrid nges don rgya mtsho'i snying po phrin las 'od 'phro*, *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid yig spyi som rtso tshig* and *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid zin bris*). These are more systematic approaches likely designed for instructing a larger group of students (see Sobisch 2003a:12); a closer academic study of these works is a desideratum.

historical context: what is its place in the life of the Eighth Karmapa and the events in Tibet? Where did the teaching take place and what can be learned about the addressee? (ii) The doctrinal content and context, namely how the contents relate to the Eighth Karmapa's and further Great Seal instructions and doctrines. Collating these analytical angles, the relation and adaptation of instruction, and addressee are discussed.

## 5.2 *Dialogues in A khu a khra's Spiritual Biography*<sup>6</sup>

In the spiritual biographies of the Eighth Karmapa, dialogues are scarce.<sup>7</sup> The two sources containing dialogues are the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* and *A khu A khra*. The passages in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* describe certain answers and questions rather than actually quoting a full dialogue.<sup>8</sup> In comparison, the dialogues embedded in *A khu A khra* are clearly quoted as being such a dialogue. Furthermore, most of these advices are centred on the Great Seal (not in sense of the term but clearly in sense of the 'essence teaching' imparted). They represent first textual witnesses that claim to contain a teaching of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>9</sup>

### 5.2.1 *Their Function in the Main Narrative*

The dialogues should not, strictly speaking, be regarded as a question and answer text (*dris lan*). Although a student requests instruction on meditation and the text portrays the Eighth Karmapa to respond, they consist of a two-way communication between the Karmapa and a student about Buddhist teaching. Furthermore, the dialogues do not necessarily express a written exchange but were allegedly orally conducted before being noted down at

<sup>6</sup> For a slightly expanded and methodologically developed discussion of these dialogues from the point of view of narratology, see Jim Rheingans, 'Narratology in Buddhist Studies: Dialogues about Meditation in a Tibetan Hagiography', in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans (Berlin: EBV, 2014), 69–112.

<sup>7</sup> To survey a larger number of spiritual biographies in search of questions and answers passages exceeds the scope of this research. Its focus remains the Eighth Karmapa.

<sup>8</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1240, documents the Eighth Karmapa's answers to an issue about self awareness (*rang rig*).

<sup>9</sup> Apart from the four dialogues there are occasional acts of speech and one further, very brief, dialogue concerning the topic of the Great Seal marginally; *A khu A khra*, fol. 32b–fol. 33a (p. 96–97).

some later point.<sup>10</sup> From the historical point of view, then, indications about the origin and production of the passages have to be researched. In order not to confuse dialogues with question and answer texts, they are called 'dialogues' here.

Dialogues further differ from question and answer texts in that they can be understood as embedded non-narrative texts in the main narrative about the Eighth Karmapa's liberation.<sup>11</sup> Taking these differences into account, some tools offered by narratology are employed to aid in understanding the textual context in addition to examining historical and doctrinal content. The categories employed are a simplified and adapted version of Genette-Bal, as explained by Schmitz and already applied by Scherer.<sup>12</sup>

Distinguishing between real author (the historical figure), implied author, and narrator, the narrator is the one narrating the elements in the text. De Jong, who has used the system of Genette-Bal for an examination of Greek classics, has distilled the subject to three main points: who is talking (the narrator) from which perspective (focus); who perceives.<sup>13</sup> In general in *A khu A khra*, the narrator of the main narrative, is heterodiegetic in that he recounts from outside the world of the narrative. The main narrative is extradiegetic in that it talks to the reader of the spiritual biography.<sup>14</sup>

For the dialogues analysed here, it is important to ask: at which point are they introduced, how do they fit into the overall plot? What could be their function within the text and plot? The standard story (consisting of all events to be depicted) of a spiritual biography about enlightened individuals

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<sup>10</sup> According to mKhan po Nges don, this recording is relatively rare and makes these dialogues unique (oral communication, December 2006). So far, no academic study has verified this claim and a detailed survey would go beyond the scope of this thesis. But when compared to the question and answer texts by Karma 'phrin las pa and by the Eighth Karmapa, their majority is indeed written.

<sup>11</sup> Bal (1997: 60). It can be debated whether the intended audience of the spiritual biography and, for example, a meditation instruction or question and answer text are the same (though Willis 1995: 5 has argued that a spiritual biography can be used as a tantric instruction or preparation for it). But the embedded dialogues definitely have an intended audience similar to that of meditation instructions, namely an individual in need of spiritual instruction.

<sup>12</sup> Schmitz (2002: 68–75); Scherer (2006c: 2–4); see also Bal (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Schmitz (2002: 73); Scherer (2006c: 3); for a discussion of focalisation, see also Bal (1981: 205–207).

<sup>14</sup> See Schmitz (2002: 72), who has used these categories of Genette-Bal with the example of classical Greek narratives. In the colophon to his own work, *A khu A khra* stresses that he has noted the marvellous events as he had witnessed them (*A khu A khra*, fol. 36b–37a/p. 104–105). With this introduction of the narrator, one may also argue that the whole narrative is recounted from a homodiegetic perspective.

is arranged in certain plots (delineating the causation of events) and expresses itself in the actual narrative text. The narrative text then works by either showing (by means of metaphor, images, etc.) or telling (directly relating its message).<sup>15</sup>

Listing the simplified topoi of the story of an incarnate Lama as exemplified by *A khu A khra*, one may distinguish: (1) pre-existences as enlightened student of the Buddha and as Buddhist masters in India and in Tibet, (2) birth accompanied by miraculous signs, (3) exhibition of special abilities, (4) recognition as rebirth of previous incarnation, (5) enthronement, (6) education with the spiritual mentor (study, reflection, and meditation), and (7) enlightened deeds.<sup>16</sup>

The four dialogues are placed in the year 1513, after a major element of the plot in the story of an incarnate Lama, the enthronement (5). The enthronement had been preceded by an account of the Karmapa's abilities as a young boy and a long dispute over his status as reincarnation. Between the enthronement and the dialogues, the narrative is replete with visions that establish the Eighth Karmapa's continued connection with the transmission lineage:<sup>17</sup> various Buddha aspects such as Mahākāla and Hayagrīva<sup>18</sup> along with important masters of the bKa' brgyud lineage such as Mi la ras pa, sGam po pa, and Karma Pakši.<sup>19</sup>

The Karmapa composed an eulogy to Mahākāla, the first written work recorded, and further convinces the inhabitants of the encampment of his authenticity, before receiving vows and tantric transmissions from the rGyal tshab Rin po che. Further visions are recounted of his predecessor, the Seventh Karmapa (along with stories from his former life) and of siddhas such as Saraha, Virupa, Padmasambhava, Marpa, and Mi la ras pa.<sup>20</sup> When the Karmapa went to Chos rdzong bKra shis Gling, blessed rice

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<sup>15</sup> Plots are those causal elements which are indispensable for the development of the actions. Ricouer, for example, considered the so called 'emplotment' as indispensable for both fictional and historical narrative in that 'the reader is guided by anticipation, focus, and retrospection' (Cobley 2001: 19).

<sup>16</sup> The elements of passing away accompanied by signs of realisation is naturally not included in *A khu A khra*, as the story is told only up to the year 1514 (*A khu A khra*, fol. 36b/p. 104: see also Chapter Three (3.4)).

<sup>17</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 22a (p. 75); see also Chapter Four (4.1.3).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. fol. 22b (p. 76).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. fol. 23a (p. 77).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. fol. 23b (p. 78)–fol. 25a (p. 81).

(usually thrown towards the objects) stuck to several consecrated statues and implements of the Seventh and Sixth Karmapa.<sup>21</sup>

With regard to the plot depicted above, the narrative after the enthronement evolves around the topoi of education (6), enlightened deeds, and show of special spiritual abilities (7), occurring in a mixed way. The narrative function of the sentences within these two topoi preceding and surrounding the dialogues may be analysed as: (i) confirmation of status as Karmapa's incarnation (through convincing those in the encampment and retelling stories from previous lives), (ii) continuity within the transmission and spiritual insights (through visions of the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage masters), (iii) formal exercise of his powers (appointing abbots, see below), and (iv) exhibition of capacities as a realised teacher (through teaching the Great Seal in the dialogues). Showing these abilities as teacher is a likely function of the embedded dialogues in the overall structure of this narrative.<sup>22</sup>

### 5.2.2 Dialogue with *A khu a khra*

The first (and also second) dialogue are placed by the source as taking place between the fourth lunar month of 1513 and the third day of the eighth lunar month of the same year.<sup>23</sup> The first dialogue's counterpart of the Karmapa is the author of the spiritual biography himself, *A khu a khra*, alias Byang chub bzang po. The geographical region in which the narrative sets the dialogues is the monastery of sDe steng, somewhere in the areas Lho rong or Khams.<sup>24</sup>

A<sup>25</sup> tea invitation of rGya ston Nang po Kun dga' rgyal mtshan and relatives

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. fol. 26a (p. 83). This image occurs in various places in the Eighth Karmapa's spiritual biographies and also in Karma 'phrin las pa's spiritual biography (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1162; translation in Rheingans 2004: 113).

<sup>22</sup> The form chosen to present the dialogues is translation (along with Tibetan text) and commentary, followed by a more detailed analysis. Such a close philological examination is necessary in order to connect the thesis to the textual sources and give an impression of the texts.

<sup>23</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 22a (p. 75); Sang rgyas dpal grub, fol. 12a (p. 172). In the fourth lunar month of 1513 the Karmapa had received the *upavāsaka* vows and empowerments from rGyal tshab Rin po che.

<sup>24</sup> The monastery of sDe stengs itself could not yet be identified, however, the region is clear from the areas the Karmapa had visited prior and after the dialogues (*A khu A khra*, fol. 31b/p. 94); see also Chapter Four (4.1.2, 4.1.3).

<sup>25</sup> I would like to acknowledge the support of the Khams-born mKhan po Karma Nges don for better understanding certain idiomatic passages of the text. Given the acquaintance he has with colloquialisms from Khams and the fact that many of them have not changed from the

(*khu dbon*) came (*slebs*).<sup>26</sup> [Karmapa] was [then] invited to bDe stengs [monastery, and the local saṅgha] made vast offerings (*'bul zhabs*). [Karmapa] granted dBon po Nam mkha' the position (*bsko bzhang*) of the head of the monastery (*gdan sa*), [along with] a [horse] saddle (*sga*), bags (*shubs*), and a red rug (*gdan*).<sup>27</sup> When staying there, one night [the Eighth Karmapa] went to his [own] bedroom<sup>28</sup> and said to A khu a khra:

'Conceptualisation is the *dharmakāya*, appearances are mind, appearances and mind are inseparable.'<sup>29</sup>

First the Karmapa is being invited and honoured. Then the setting moves from official to private, namely to the bedroom of the Karmapa. Implicitly the attendant is also placed in this space. Since it can be assumed that the bedroom of the Karmapa was considered accessible only to those closest to him, the attendant in the chamber of the Karmapa invokes an image of closeness.

Before the dialogue the narrator has in general narrated from a heterodiegetic (from outside the narrative) and from extradiegetic perspective (to an audience outside the narrative). He continues doing so when opening the dialogues: 'and said to A khu a khra ....' At the outset of the embedded dialogue new narrators are introduced, recounting homodiegetically and to an intradiegetic audience, namely to the attendant A khu a khra. For the first time the character of A khu a khra is introduced in the narrative. Remarkably, it is the Karmapa who begins the dialogue with a statement.

Doctrinally, this statement expresses the very core of sGam po pa's Great Seal teachings in equating Buddhist terms that are, in more conventional analysis, considered opposite; namely, conceptualisation (Tib. *rnam rtog*, Skt. *vikalpa*) and the truth body of a Buddha, the *dharmakāya*. Here, however, instead of using the frequently employed phrase 'essence

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sixteenth century until today, his information on these linguistic intricacies was very valuable.

<sup>26</sup> A more unlikely version (because *slebs* is not honorific) would be: '[Karmapa] arrived [upon] the invitation for tea of rGya ston Nang po Kun dga' rgyal mtshan and relatives (*khu dbon*).'

<sup>27</sup> Or 'cushion'. Here, this could mean that he put him on a throne and thereby granted him this position as a performative act. Alternatively, these implements simply belong to the position.

<sup>28</sup> *gZims mal*. Goldstein (2001): honorific of *nyal sa* – bedroom.

<sup>29</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 26 a (p. 83): *yang rgya ston nang po kun dga' rgyal mtshan khu dbon gyi ja 'dren slebs/ bde stengs su gdan drangs/ 'bul zhabs rgya chen po byas/ dbon po nam mkha' la gdan sa'i bsko bzhang sga shubs gdan dmar gnang/ der bzhugs dus nub gcig gzims mal du phebs nas a khu a khra la/ rnam rtog chos sku yin/ snang ba sems yin/ snang sems dbyer med yin gsungs.*

(*ngo bo*) of conceptualisation is the *dharmakāya* (*rnam rtog gi ngo bo chos sku*), the text just uses the plain 'conceptualisation is *dharmakāya*.'<sup>30</sup>

The idea that appearances are (projections of) mind is a rather well known Mahāyāna teaching from the Indian Yogācāra, often named 'merely mind' (*cittamātra*).<sup>31</sup> In a question and answer text presumably composed later, the Eighth Karmapa stresses that these two points stem from different levels of doctrine. The Karmapa was asked whether objecting to conceptualisation as being the *dharmakāya*, and to the assertion that appearances are mind would mean to denigrate the Karma bKa' brgyud. He replied that not maintaining that appearances are mind would damage the Yogācāra, he had not heard of anyone asserting that it would refer to the bKa' brgyud pa.<sup>32</sup> In this dialogue, however, the Karmapa seems to use both to incite the exchange which continues:

A khu a khra said: 'Yes (lags),<sup>33</sup> thoughts are delusion, but appearances and mind are different. For example, this butter lamp has the ability to burn and illuminate, however, in the very moment [it] is impermanent; in the same way (ltar) all conditioned phenomena are impermanent. The *dharmakāya* has neither [the characteristic of] permanence nor impermanence.'<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Conceptualisation and conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* is a key topic of sGam po pa's *rNam rtog don dam gyi sngos sprod* (critically edited and translated by Sherpa 2004: 188–293); see also the famed statement in dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i phreng ba*, p. 117: *rnam rtog ngo chos skur gsungs pa*. For a further discussion of the conceptualisation/*dharmakāya* instructions of the Eighth Karmapa, see Chapter Six (6.2). The Great Seal use of *rnam rtog* is translated here as 'conceptualisation'. Its Apabhraṃśa parallel is *v/biappa*, Skt. *vikalpa* (Kværne 1977: Saraha, Caryāgiti 19, 20). Willis (1979: 34) uses 'discursive thought' in the context of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. *Dharmakāya* became synonym for Buddhature in Ratnagotravibhāga I.27 (Zimmermann 2002: 54 has described the move from *buddhajñāna* as stated in the *Tathāgatarbhasūtra*). Here it may be used in similar terms as in sGam po pa's *Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs*, pp. 527f., indicating luminosity of mind. But mostly, this dialogue with A khu a khra is rather an informal exchange.

<sup>31</sup> The most important thinkers of the Indian Yogācāra were Maitreya, Asaṅga (310–390), and Vasubandhu (fourth century) (for Indian Yogācāra, see, for example, Schmithausen 1973a, 1976, 1987, 1998; Anacker 1984; Tola and Dragonetti 2004; Kramer 2005). Its treatises, such as the *Abhisamayakālaṃkāra* or *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, widespread in Tibet, lead to manifold and conflicting interpretations (Mathes 1996: 155–252 discusses Tibetan commentaries of the *Dharmadharmaṭāvibhāga*; see Kapstein 1997, Kapstein 2000: 116–119, and Brunnhölzl 2004: 445–527, for the debates around the Yogācāra and *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka; see also Mathes 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGya ston bya bral ba'i dris lan*, fol. 6a (p. 281).

<sup>33</sup> Note the usage of the polite 'yes' (*lags*) which here rather expresses 'no'.

<sup>34</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 26 a (p. 83): *a khu a khras/ lags rnam rtog 'khrul pa yin snang sems tha dad yin/ dper na mar me 'di 'bar ba dang gsal ba'i nus pa yod kyang/ skad cig nyid la mi rtag pa ltar 'dus byas thams cad mi rtag pa yin/ chos sku la rtag pa dang mi rtag pa gang*

So A khu a khra rejects this equation. The objection the narrator A khu a khra uses is a concept also found in the Buddhist metaphysics of the *Abhidharmakośa*, which Tibetan scholars often perceived as generally representing Southern Buddhism<sup>35</sup>; that thoughts are delusion and appearances and mind are defined differently. He illustrates this with the distinction of conditioned phenomena (Skt. *saṃskṛta*) as impermanent, non-conditioned phenomena as permanent, and the *dharmakāya* beyond it.<sup>36</sup>

It is to be assumed that A khu a khra's objection does not express true disagreement or incredulity but rather an invitation to discussion; as A khu a khra must have been well acquainted with the meditative Great Seal teachings of the bKa' brgyud pa, his disagreement can be regarded a rhetorical one.<sup>37</sup>

[Karmapa] replied: 'People [like you] saying "thoughts are not the *dharmakāya* and appearances are not mind" get dust in your mouth!<sup>38</sup> You, who eat the food of the Dwags po bKa' brgyud, are a shame and disgrace.'<sup>39</sup>

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*yang med zhus pas/*. It is justified to, in the last passage, add the word 'characteristic' for describing the *dharmakāya*, or else translate it as 'there is in the *dharmakāya* neither permanence nor impermanence.'

<sup>35</sup> See Griffith (1999: 56), for the importance of the *Abhidharmakośa* to the development of the Indian Vaibhāṣika/Sarvāstivāda systems of meditation and their dualism of mind and matter. The *Abhidharmakośa* (and the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivāda for monastic discipline) were often perceived in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions as representative of their kind, despite the much vaster array of textual traditions and interpretations in India (cf. Scherer 2005: 85; Cox 2004a). A khu a khra had most likely learned the Tibetan and artificial system of *grub mtha'* (Skt. *siddhānta*), where for example the eighteen Vaibhāṣikas subsects are perceived only through the interpretations of the *Abhidharmakośa* (Hopkins 1996: 175).

<sup>36</sup> Cox (2004: 5) explains the *abhidharmic* distinctions *saṃskṛta* and *asaṃskṛta*, the *saṃskṛta* phenomena subject to arising and passing away. Schmithausen (1987: vol. I, 201) briefly explains with the aid of Yogācāra material that momentary phenomena are illusory, 'in the sense that all external phenomena, being (at least co-)conditioned by subjective concepts (*vikalpa*), are ultimately illusory'. Conditioned phenomena are often defined in the Pramāṇa traditions as those, which can perform a function in the sense of the *svalakṣaṇa* (Tillemans 1999: 210–13).

<sup>37</sup> It has been pointed out that he compiled manuals of the 'oral transmission of Ras chung pa' the *Ras chung snyan brgyud*, which is a lineage and teaching centred around esoteric tantric precepts and Great Seal instructions (Smith 2001: 64; see Sernesi 2004, for an account of the early transmission of this lineage; see Rheingans 2004: 61–63, for the relation of the Karmapa's teacher Karma 'phrin las pa to his masters; see also Chapter Three (3.4)).

<sup>38</sup> According to the linguistic information by mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, January 2007), the metaphor of *kha la thal ba* denotes: *mang po bshad mkhan yin na yang bden pa ha go ma song* = 'someone who talks much but does not understand the truth', *gang byung mang byung bshad na yang don dag ha ma go ba* = 'to talk all kind of stuff but not understanding the meaning'. He says it is not much used these days.

<sup>39</sup> *Ngo tsa yi mug* was here understood as *ngo tsa dang yi mug*.



From the Drung [A khu]: '[this] is the advice<sup>40</sup> of the powerful ones [such as a great lama].<sup>41</sup> Through conceptualisation [one] is propelled in Cyclic Existence. Appearance existing as stony mountains, solid and coarse, and formless mind to be one is pointless (*don med*).'<sup>42</sup>

The wording of the Karmapa's response may sound surprisingly strong. But the use of straightforward language in communicating with a student can, the more so in traditions of guru-devotion, express the strong bond between guru and disciple.<sup>43</sup> It seems admissible to interpret this directness as (i) being an expression of the Karmapa's youth and humour, and (ii) again emphasising the close relationship to his attendant. A khu a khra in turn has continued to oppose the Karmapa, who responds with an argument.<sup>44</sup>

'If appearances are not mind, it follows that all the different phenomena are not of one taste (*ro gcig*), because thoughts (*rnam rtog*) are not the *dharmakāya*. Further, a *dharmakāya* which is something different from the thoughts; bring it [to me], show it [to me]!'

[The Karmapa] had many such discussions about the dharma.<sup>45</sup>

The logic used here appears somewhat incoherent as the wrong consequence, namely that all phenomena are not of 'one taste' (*ro gcig*) already

<sup>40</sup> *Zhal ta* according to mKhan po Nges don honorific for *skad cha /bslab bya*. Goldstein (2001): hon. of *kha ta* = 1. advice, counsel; example: *mo la kha ta ga tshod byas nas yang ma byung nyan*.

<sup>41</sup> This was inferred after a discussion with mKhan po Nges don. In fact, *dbang yod* could also be interpreted as someone who is empowered in the Vajrayāna.

<sup>42</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 25a (p. 83): *rnam rtog chos sku min zer* [fol. 26b/p. 84] *ba dang snang ba sems min zer ba'i mi khyod kyi kha la thal ba thob/ khyod dwags po bka'* brgyud kyi lto za ba ngo tsa yi mug gsung/ drung nas dbang yod kyi zhal ta yin/ rnam rtog gis 'khor bar 'phen/ snang ba pha ri'i brag sra mkhregs can du 'dug pa dang sems gzugs med gcig don med zhus pas/.

<sup>43</sup> Especially in the Vajrayāna and among the legends of the early bKa' brgyud pa masters, such as Marpa and Mi la ras pa, there are stories of scolding, beating, and similar ordeals. The student's ability to endure it in turn aids as a proof for his unwavering devotion (Lhalungpa 1986: 47–70).

<sup>44</sup> The Tibetan text for this passage is corrupt ('o na brag tu snang ba de nam mkha' de nam mkha' ltar mi 'dzin par thal/ sems min pa'i sra mkhregs 'gyur med yin pa'i phyir/). A satisfactory solution for translating this sentence could not be found, as an earlier version of this text is not available. An attempt at translation would be: '[Karmapa] said: "Well, that appearing as stone; it follows that this space is not grasped as space, because the solid [here one letter, sometimes 'solid and firm'] which is not mind is unchangeable."'

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.: 'o na brag tu snang ba de nam mkha' de nam mkha' ltar mi 'dzin par thal/ sems min pa'i sra mkhregs 'gyur med yin pa'i phyir/ zhes dang snang ba sems min na chos thams cad du ma ro gcig min par thal/ rnam rtog chos sku min pa'i phyir/ yang rnam rtog las logs su gyur pa'i chos sku de khyer la shog la [las] nga la ston dang gsung ba sogs chos kyi gsung gleng mang du mdzad do/.

implies the theory of the Great Seal.<sup>46</sup> The Karmapa's demand to bring him such a *dharmakāya* can be regarded as a pedagogical means and resembles the pointing out (*ngo sprod*) of the mind. The embedded dialogue is closed again by the main narrator, who positions the dialogue into a series of discussions (as indicated by the Tibetan 'and so on' or 'such', *la sogs*).

To sum up, the doctrinal point of the dialogue centres on a major Great Seal topic, namely that conceptualisation and *dharmakāya* are essentially equated. The introductory statement and the ensuing objection contrast the metaphysical teachings of the Abhidharma with the Mahāyāna idea that cyclic existence and nirvāṇa are inseparable.<sup>47</sup> The Great Seal traditions further developed this idea into the spontaneous practice of the innate, transcending duality.<sup>48</sup> It is precisely these teachings which dominate the following dialogues.

### 5.2.3 Dialogue with rGya ston Nang so Seng ge ba

This dialogue revolves around a further central term and key concept of the Great Seal, heavily used by sGam po pa and his disciples: the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). In the *Dwags po bka'* 'bum it is used as a synonym for other Great Seal key terms such as 'the innate' (Skt. *sahaja*).<sup>49</sup>

The context in the narrative is that the Karmapa met rGya ston Nang so Seng ge ba, apparently an official from the Eastern Tibetan area of rGya ston, where the young Karmapa had loyal supporters and students.<sup>50</sup> rGya

<sup>46</sup> The term also denotes the third of the so-called four yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) of meditative development in the Great Seal traditions (see Namgyal 1986: 387–93 and Chapter Two (2.1.1)).

<sup>47</sup> Such as for example in the Prajñāparāmitā-literature and Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, XV.2.

<sup>48</sup> This philosophical move allowed for the possibility of sudden enlightenment. The sudden rhetoric often locates the individual already at the end of the path with practice consisting of looking at the nature of mind (Bielefeldt 2005: 238 f.).

<sup>49</sup> Kragh (1998: 34), quoting Shes rab byang chub (*sNying po don gyi gdams pa phyag rgya chen po'i 'bum tig*, *Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 1, p. 211).

<sup>50</sup> rGya ston Nang so Seng ge ba probably came from the same area (namely rGya ston in Khams) as rGya ston Chos rje and his successor rGya ston bya bral ba Nam mkha'i rgyal mtshan. It is known about rGya ston bya bral ba that he received teachings from Karma 'phrin las pa in 1502 (Karma 'phrin las pa I, 'Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *Dri lan pad ma dkar po*, p. 92) and became an attendant of the Eighth Karmapa from 1507 onwards. He invited the Eighth Karmapa, in 1512, to his monastery 'Brang ra dgon before (*A khu A khra*, fol. 19a/p. 69) and was also recognised by the Eighth Karmapa as the re-embodiment of rGya ston Chos rje (Rheingans 2004: 169). A question and answer text further documents an exchange on various matters (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGya ston bya bral ba'i dris*

ston Nang so Seng ge ba asked him to consecrate statues with rice (among them one of rGya ston Chos rje), whereupon the Karmapa said that the real Buddha or master had melted into the statue. Nang so ba obtained the trust of the Eighth Karmapa being a Buddha.

The next day in Rag yul [at the] Zam kha (bridge), rGya ston Nang so Seng ge ba said: 'You must grant me a dharma [teaching].'

[Karmapa] said: 'In that case, the essence (*ngo bo*) of conceptualisation (*rnam rtog*) is the *dharmakāya*. Therefore conceptualisation and timeless awareness (*ye shes*) being undifferentiated is the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). Much need not be said—that suffices.'<sup>51</sup>

In his answer the Karmapa employs the word 'essence' (*ngo bo*) when explaining conceptualisation to be the *dharmakāya*, unlike in the previous dialogue. This equality of apparently conventional and ultimate terms is then defined as the famous Great Seal term 'ordinary mind' (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). The phrase: 'much need not be said—that suffices', in a way, implies the concept of the *dkar po gcig thub*, the single remedy that cures all.<sup>52</sup> When rGya ston asks the Karmapa to explicate, the Karmapa equates the ordinary mind with various elements:

[rGya ston] asked: 'The ordinary mind and concepts—in which way are they one?'

[Karmapa] points with his finger at three barley grains, which are on a table in front of him (*sku mdun*) and says:

'Concepts (*rnam rtog*), the grains, and the stone of the mountain over there are not different. Empty space (*nam mkha'*) and all the obstructing matter, are similar (*'dra*) in not being different.'<sup>53</sup>

[rGya ston asked:] 'Is there a size (*che chung*) to the ordinary mind?'<sup>54</sup>

[Karmapa] replied: 'To the [ordinary mind] there is no size, nor is there before and after to the ordinary mind.'

*lan*). In 1521, the Karmapa was invited by rGya ston Bya bral ba to rGya ston (*Kam tshang*, p. 320).

<sup>51</sup> A *khu A khra*, fol. 28a: *phyi nyin rag yul zam kha na rgya ston nang so seng ge bas nged la chos shig gngang dgos zhus pas/ 'o na rnam rtog gyi ngo bo de chos sku yin pas rnam rtog dang ye shes khyad med pa de tha mal gyi shes pa yin/ mang po brjod mi dgos pas des chog gsungs*.

<sup>52</sup> See Jackson, D. (1994: 149–158), for occurrences with sGam po pa's writings and Lama Zhang's *Zab lam mthar thug*.

<sup>53</sup> According to mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, Jan 2007), the *'dra* refers to the last part of the sentence and has the meaning of *gcig*. Usually the *'dra* should be with a referent to compare to, this is rare. It could also refer to the *ci 'dra*.

<sup>54</sup> One may ask oneself whether size here refers to the extent of realisation, but the context suggests the idea of physical size.

[rGya ston asked:] 'Is there a difference between the ordinary mind in the evening and the ordinary mind in the morning?'

[Karmapa] replied: 'All these have no difference. I will explain [it in] detail (*zhib cha*) later (*rjes nas*).'<sup>55</sup>

On the next morning [he] asked: 'Please explain in detail' and [Karmapa] said, 'You [just] ask!'

[And he] said: 'Sir (*lags*), is there [anything] for accomplishing Buddhahood apart from the ordinary mind?'

[Karmapa] said: 'No, there is nothing apart [from it].'

[rGya ston] asked: 'Is there a phenomenon (*chos*)<sup>56</sup> or Buddha not contained ('*dus pa*) within ordinary mind?'

[Karmapa] said: 'Not a single one. If there were, you bring [it] and I will keep (*nya ra*) it!'<sup>57</sup>

Through this array of similes the Karmapa has almost made the ordinary mind into an all-encompassing entity and the single most important point to comprehend about the Buddha's teaching—at least for his recipient. rGya ston Nang so, as one may expect, finally goes on to ask about the cultivation and view to which this teaching is connected:

[rGya ston] asked: 'Does one need to cultivate (*sgom*) this ordinary mind or not?'

[Karmapa] replied: 'Beginners need to cultivate it. Then [later] there is no need [to do so].'

[rGya ston:] 'What view is that?'

[Karmapa:] 'The ordinary mind is [the view]<sup>58</sup>, therefore the fruition, too, is that [view]. If one understands that there is no phenomenon (*chos*) which is not included in the ordinary mind, [one] becomes a Buddha.'<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 28a (p. 87): *tha mal gyi shes pa dang nam rtoḡ gcig tshul ci 'dra yin lags zhus pas/ sku mdun na cog tse'i steng na nas 'bru gsum 'dug pa la phyag mdzud gtad nas/ nam rtoḡ dang nas 'bru dang pha ri'i brag 'di mams la khyad par med/ nam mkha' stong pa dang bem po thogs bcas thams cad tha dad med par 'dra gsungs/ tha mal shes pa* [fol. 28b/p. 88] *che chung e yod zhus pas/ che chung tha mal shes pa la snga phyi med gsung/ do nub kyi tha mal shes pa dang nang par gyi tha mal shes pa la khyad par e yod zhus pas/ de kun la khyad med zhib cha rjes nas byes gsung.*

<sup>56</sup> Here, *chos* might also indicate the Buddha-qualities or properties (Skt. *guṇa*, Tib. *yon tan*; for example *Ratnagotravibhāga* III.4, 6: *tathāgatadharmā*).

<sup>57</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 28b (p. 88): *phyi nang zhib cha gsung bar zhu zhus pas/ khyod kyis dris dang gsungs/ lags tha mal shes pa las logs su sangs rgyas sgrub rgyu e yod zhus pas logs na med gsung/ tha mal shes pa la ma 'dus pa'i chos sam sangs rgyas e yod zhus pas gcig kyang med/ yod na khyod kyi [read kyis] khyer la shog dang nges nya ra bya gsungs/.*

<sup>58</sup> It is likely that the answer refers to the questions. Therefore, for the personal pronouns: 'this, that, the' (*de*), the word 'view' (*lta ba*) was added here.

<sup>59</sup> Literally: 'goes to Buddhahood'.

[Karmapa] continued (*gsungs*): 'The stainless nature of mind (*sems nyid*) cannot be defiled by rocks (*rdo gong*)<sup>60</sup> or stony mountains. If this rock is established in its unfabricated essence, there will come no better *dharmakāya* than the rock. Further, the tail of an old Gya mo dog and the head protuberance (Skt. *uṣṇīṣa*) of a Buddha are one!'

[rGya ston:] 'In what context (*skabs*)<sup>61</sup> is this [taught]?'

And [Karmapa:] 'In the context of the bKa' brgyud pas.'<sup>62</sup>

Cultivation of the ordinary mind is thus for beginners; the advanced practitioner is supposed to let go of any artifice. On the whole this dialogue, revolving around the term 'ordinary mind', functions to bridge path and fruition and the seeming dichotomy of coarse appearances with the *dharmakāya* and—in this context—enlightenment. Strikingly, the Karmapa uses a metaphor to illustrate his point which is found again later: the comparison between an attribute of the Buddha and one of a dog.

#### 5.2.4 Dialogue with dGa' ldan dBon po Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan

The third dialogue is located in a monastery called dGa' ldan, somewhere in Khams, and has meditation as its main topic.<sup>63</sup>

In bSa' gyi khang [Karmapa] had a vision of the King of Śākyas (Buddha Śākyamuni).<sup>64</sup> Then in the valley (*lung*) [of] Ral monastery, on a meadowed

<sup>60</sup> *rdo gong* is, according to mKhan po Nges don, in colloquial Tibetan an expression for stone (*rdo*).

<sup>61</sup> Here the standard translation 'time' for *skabs* does not apply. It rather refers to: 'case, opportunity' (Jäschke 1995) and was translated more freely as 'context'.

<sup>62</sup> A *khu A khra*, fol. 28b (p. 88): *tha mal shes pa de sgom dgos sam mi dgos zhus pas/ las dang po pas sgom dgos gsungs de nas mi dgos gsungs lta ba de ci yin zhus pas/ tha mal gyi shes pa de yin pas 'bras bu yang de yin gsung/ tha mal shes pa min pa'i chos med par go na sangs rgyas 'gro gsungs/ sems nyid dri ma med pa la rdo gong dang brag ri 'di rnam kyis dri ma byed mi thub/ rdo gong 'di spros bral gyi ngo bor grub na rdo gong las chos sku bzang po mi 'ong gsungs/ yang khyi rgan gya bo'i nga ma dang sangs rgyas kyi gtsug gtor gcig yin gsungs/ gang gi skabs su yin zhus pas/ bka' brgyud pa'i skabs su yin gsungs/.*

<sup>63</sup> It could be the dGa' ldan ma mo monastery of the Zhwa dmar pa's, which the Eighth Karmapa visited at a later point, around 1523 (see Chapter Four (4.1.5); for the monastery, see Ehrhard 2002a: 15).

<sup>64</sup> At first the function of the ergative marker seemed unclear, as from other spiritual biographies it was expected that the Karmapa had perceived the vision as agent. mKhan po Nges don, however, has held that it is usually the noble being who does the action of 'looking' (*gzigs*) upon the protagonist of the story and is therefore logically marked by the ergative. Though not seen too often, it occurs frequently in this text. It may be a misspelling of the scribe or else indicate the sometimes variant use of the *byed sgra* and *'brel sgra*. Or else one may rethink the concept of vision: the Tibetan author considers the Buddha the one gazing upon the Karmapa; this means, then, that the Karmapa is able to see him.

plain scattered with flowers, where the Karmapa played a lot;<sup>65</sup> the teacher dGa' ldan dBon po Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and his students offered a *maṇḍala*. And [he] requested:

'Explain a method (*lugs*) for doing meditation.'<sup>66</sup>

In a picturesque setting, the partner in the dialogue is introduced as a devoted student and head (*dbon po*) of a monastery. The first phrase indicates the topic of the dialogue: meditation.

[Karmapa replied:] 'If you wish to meditate, you should [do a meditation] which is like space. This will be sufficient.'

[dBon po:] 'How to do it "like space"?'

[Karmapa:] 'If you do [meditate] like space [meditation or meditator]<sup>67</sup> do not become "like space" [in the literal sense]. The concepts (*rnam rtog*) themselves are space!'

[dBon po:] 'In that case, does one need to give up those concepts through non-conceptualisation?'

[Karmapa:] 'You, hoping to become a good meditator wish to give up concepts.<sup>68</sup> In such a way the [realisation of] the *dharmakāya* itself (*kho na*) will not come about!'<sup>69</sup>

The use of the word space (*nam mkha'*) here is noteworthy. In the *Abhidharmakośa* and *Abhidharmasamuccaya* literature, space (Skt. *ākāśa*, also *gagaṇa* or Apabhraṃśa *gaṇa*, see fn.72) had been incorporated among the uncompounded phenomena, still far from any soteriological

<sup>65</sup> Could be also without an explicit agent 'where plenty of play is done'. Because of the polite form of the verb *mdzad*, however, it is likely that the Karmapa is the one playing.

<sup>66</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 29a (p. 89): *bsa' gyu khang du bcom ldan 'das* [fol. 29 b] *śākya'i rgyal pos zhal gzigs de nas ral gyi dgon lung du spang thang me tog bcal du bkram par sku rtse mang du mdzad pa'i sar dga' ldan dbon po nam mkha' rgyal mtshan dpon slob kyis maṇḍal phul nas sgom byed lugs shig zhu zhus pa*.

<sup>67</sup> *Nam mkha' ltar mi 'gro*. One may interpret this shortened phrase to the end that meditation itself should not become like space (*sgom nam mkha' ltar mi 'gro*). Depending on how meditation is comprehended at this stage, it may include the meditator and meditation (which is like space, *nam mkha' 'dra*) are semantically understood as one.

<sup>68</sup> *Bzang por re ba la*. The sentence is syntactically better explained by a grammatical temporal function of the *ba la* ('while ...', also translatable as 'and'), the phrase up to *re ba* being a nominalisation. Or the *re ba la* is more a referent for the 'ong, which is a verb of going: 'For those hoping ... the realisation of ... will not come.' In either case the meaning remains the same.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. fol. 29b (p. 90): *sgom 'dod na nam mkha' 'dra ba zhiḡ gyis dang des chog gsungs/ nam mkha' ltar ci ltar byed zhus pas/ nam mkha' ltar byed na nam mkha' ltar mi 'gro/ rnam rtog kho rang nam mkha' yin gsungs /'o na rnam rtog de mi rtog pas spangs e dgos zhus pas khyod sgom chen bzang por re ba la rnam rtog spang 'dod lugs kyis chos sku kho na mi 'ong gsungs*.

significance (and a point not accepted by the Theravāda).<sup>70</sup> It is used as a simile for the Buddha-mind in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, and a simile for the pervasiveness of Buddha-nature in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.<sup>71</sup> One finds allusion to mind as space-like in the Indian *dohā* literature and Tibetan songs on the Great Seal.<sup>72</sup>

But rarely occurs the shift from 'like space' (*nam mkha' 'dra*) to the straight 'concepts are space' (*nam mkha' yin*), as the Eighth Karmapa stipulates in this advice to meditation. It exemplifies a free use of metaphor and a vital point in the Great Seal traditions: space as virtually a replacement of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the *dharmakāya*.

This passage outlines another key idea of the Great Seal: concepts do not have to be given up by an antidote (*gnyen po*); antidotes like non-conceptualisation (*mi rtog pa*) are superfluous. In some of the Yogācāra works, for example, it was precisely the nonconceptual awareness (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*) developed on the path of seeing (*darśanamārga*), which overcomes the defilements.<sup>73</sup> Here again, the wish to rid oneself of concepts is

<sup>70</sup> For example, in the *Kathāvatthu* of the Pāli *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* (see Scherer 2005: 85–87). Vasubhandu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* III. 18, too, states for uncompounded phenomena: *ākāśaṃ dvau nirodhau ca* ('empty space and the two types of extinction'). For the Pāli *Abhidhamma*, see also Ñānātiloka (1983); for the various Buddhist *dharma* theories, see also Willemen (2004: 220–224) and Bronkhorst (1985).

<sup>71</sup> *Ratnagotravibhāga* VIII. 48–49, IX. 51–62 (Takasaki 1966: 237ff.); *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* Ms, fol. 4b, 3–4.

<sup>72</sup> See for example Saraha's *Dohākoṣa* 12, 42a, 42b (ed. Jackson, R. 2004), where it is said to 'grasp the mind as being like space, as naturally spacious grasp the mind to be' using the Tibetan *nam mkha'i 'dra* 'like space' (verse only extant in Tibetan). And also *Dohākoṣa* 72, were the Apabhraṃśa and Sanskrit *kha-sama* 'like space' is used. Space is used also as a synonym for emptiness in Kāṇha's *Dohākoṣa* 7 (ed. Jackson, R. 2004), 'to the degree that emptiness is the 'source', or condition for the possibility, of all forms, so too, space is the source of all the other elements' (Apabhraṃśa here: *gaṇa*). A song attributed to Maitrīpa says: '... the Mahāmudrā, free from extremes, which is like space' (trans. Tsang Nyön Heruka 1995: 28) and again the Tibetan *mkha' mnyam* in Saraha's *sKu'i mdzod 'chi med rdo rje'i glu*, 2: '... suchness, the space like quality of emptiness and appearance' (quoted after Braitstein 2004: 158).

<sup>73</sup> See for example Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama* (trans. Sharma 1997: 92). In the *vastu*-chapter of the *Viniścayaśaṃgrahanī* (of the *Yogācārabhūmi*), too, *vikalpa* has (like *nāman*) basically a negative connotation (Kramer 2005: 34–38), the same holds true for the *Tattvārtha*-chapter of the *Yogācārabhūmi*'s *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Willis 1979: 39–40, and translation of section IV, *ibid.* 125–166). Āryasūra's *Pāramitāsamāsa* explains that meditation means to overcome wrong concepts (*vikalpa*, here relating to such ideas as permanence, self etc.) in the chapter on the meditation *pāramitā* verse, 70/71 (translation Saito: 2005: 259; edition of the Sanskrit text, *ibid.* 383).

identified as 'hope', an artificial state of mind, which, in fact, leads away from realisation.

[dBon po:] 'Further, please explain to me (*thugs la 'dogs pa*)<sup>74</sup> how to hold the energy-winds and how to meditate on the six doctrines [of Nāropa]?'

[Karmapa:] 'For those very things; you need to understand concepts as *dharmakāya*!'<sup>75</sup>

One may interpret these last lines as containing a crucial assumption: this student is informed that the path of Nāropa, too, is accomplished with understanding the liberating insight into the nature of one's thoughts as *dharmakāya*.<sup>76</sup>

### 5.2.5 Dialogue with *Mi nyag sKya ging Bya bral ba*

Still travelling in Eastern Tibet in the same year, the Karmapa is invited to a place called *Me tog ra ba*. The dialogue occurs at a place supposedly near this site, which is referred to by the first word *de*. The Karmapa's counterpart in this dialogue can, through his name, be identified as a meditator from region of *Mi nyag* in Eastern Tibet.<sup>77</sup>

There in the late evening, *Mi nyag sKya ging Bya bral ba* asked:

<sup>74</sup> Jäschke (1995) gives *thugs la 'dogs pa*: 'to interest one's self (*sic*!) in or for, to take care of' which would rather change the meaning into: 'Do I need to interest myself in the ...' mKhan po Nges don explained that here *thugs la 'dogs pa* means 'to explain' ('further, [you] need to explain from your mind...'), understanding the passage as: *khyod rang gi thugs la yod pa'i gdams ngag nga la 'dogs*. Both versions are convincing. *De ka* or *de kha* is according to Jäschke 'the very same'. Goldstein (2001): *de ka*, 'just that' also sm. to *de ga* 'over there' but also *de ga* similar to *de ka*.

<sup>75</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 29b (p. 90): *yang rlung bzung lugs dang chos drug sgom lugs thugs la 'dogs dgos zhus pas/ de ga la mam rtog chos skur shes dgos gsungs/*. It is interesting to note the perfect stem *spangs* here. It may show the (expected) result of the action, namely that one should be able to successfully give up concepts through non-conceptuality.

<sup>76</sup> There is some similarity to a passage in the *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan*: when the First Karmapa had requested instructions on the path of means (*thabs lam*), sGam po pa advised 'that thing that I always teach will do' (*kun tu bshad pa des chog*), referring to the essential teaching that suffices (see Jackson, D. 1994: 153, for a translation of the passage and the Tibetan text).

<sup>77</sup> *Mi nyag* is a region in slightly eastwards of Khams (Kapstein 2006b: Map 1). Search on the person brought only limited results: *Mi nyag rdo rje seng ge* (b. 1462) or the dGa' ldan abbot *Mi nyag rdo rje bzang po* (1491–1554) do both not fit (*Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center*, www.tbrc.org, 15th February 2007).



'These days (*da zhag*) I have experienced sickness and unclear meditation.<sup>78</sup> Kindly assist (*dgos*) me and [give me a means] to remove [these] obstacles.'<sup>79</sup>

To that (*pa la*)<sup>80</sup> the Drung [Karmapa] said:

'You should remove obstacles through the essence of conceptualisation (*nam rlog*)!'

And he further said:

'Do not harbour hope<sup>81</sup> which longs to obtain the result. If [you] harbour hope wishing to obtain the result you are not a good meditator (*sgom chen*). Light rays (*'od zer*) of the Buddha and a dog's hair—the two are not different! Settle [your mind] on those two as [being] in union!<sup>82</sup> In this state, practice the freedom from refuting or accomplishing, the A li kā li conduct<sup>83,84</sup>.

Typical elements seen in the preceding dialogues present themselves: the direct recognition of conceptualisation is advocated as the single, sufficient remedy, be it to do with bodily problems or difficulties in meditation. Apparently, detecting some hope in the questioner's wish for removing obstacles, the Karmapa identifies the wish itself as the very obstacle to true

<sup>78</sup> The *byung ba* can be a forerunner of the later *egophorique* non-intentional of colloquial Tibetan. It implies that something involuntary just happened to one (Kasang Gyurme 1992: 222). Grammatically one can easily refer the *byung ba* to both actions *na ba* and *sgom mi gsal ba*. It would, however, not be entirely wrong to only refer it to *sgom mi gsal ba*.

<sup>79</sup> Jäschke (1995) has for *thugs rjes gzigs* (sm. to '*dzin*'), 'be so kind as to grant ...'. One may think of *gegs sel ba* (nominalised) and then the 'grant' as 'please give me a removal/removing of obstacles'. According to the *bdag gzhan* distinction, the present stem rather than belonging to *bdag* could mean that it is a method of removing obstacles. This was indeed how the mKhan po Nges don semantically explained this sentence. I think both ways of translating would be correct. One could also expect a *sel ba la/ ched du* or at least a connective.

<sup>80</sup> Could also be the temporal function like 'while/after he was asking ... the Karmapa ...'.

<sup>81</sup> Present with an imperative connotation.

<sup>82</sup> The *la don* could here indicate locus (metaphorical): In the union of these two/these two being in union. One may interpret it as *de nyid* as well: 'that they are in union'.

<sup>83</sup> A li kā lī'i *spyod pa*. According to mKhan po it is one kind of tantric conduct. It is neither mentioned within the *Kālacakratra*, ed. Vira R. and L. Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1966) or *Hevajratra*, ed. David L. Snellgrove (London: Oxford University Press, 1959) nor among the four kinds of tantric conduct (Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros and mTshur phu rGyal tshab bKra shis dpal 'byor, *rTsa lung 'phrul 'khor*, p. 168–170).

<sup>84</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 32a (p. 95): *der dgongs phyi mo zhig la mi nyag skya ging bya bral bas nga da zhag na ba dang sgom mi gsal ba byung bas gegs sel thugs rjes 'dzin dgos zhus pa la/ drung nas/ khyod kyis nam rlog gi ngo bo des gegs sel gsungs/ 'bras thob 'dod kyi re ba ma byed/ 'bras bu thob 'dod kyi re ba byas na sgom chen min/ sangs rgyas kyi 'od zer dang/ khyi'i spu gnyis la khyad med/ de gnyis zung 'jug tu zhog/ de'i ngang la dgag sgrub dang bral ba a li kā lī'i spyod pa gyis gsungs/.*

meditation. The goal of enlightenment being constantly present in ordinary things is by now a familiar metaphor: the comparison (or equalisation) of a dog's attribute with the attribute of a Buddha. The discourse ends:

[The Karmapa] then ripped out a single hair (*'jag ma*)<sup>85</sup> of the bedding (*gzims 'bog*)<sup>86</sup> and held it in the hand, saying:

'The three [Buddha] bodies are complete in that!'

[Mi nyag:] 'How are they complete?'

[Karmapa:] 'This very hair is the *dharmakāya*, therefore the *dharmakāya* [is present].<sup>87</sup> As it is standing [upright] (*longs pe 'dug pas*)<sup>88</sup> the *saṃbhogakāya* [is present]. That it is moved (*sprul sprul*) by wind (*rlung*)<sup>89</sup> is the *nirmāṇakāya*.<sup>90</sup>

Again, an 'ordinary' phenomenon of this world (here the hair from the bed) is used to point out the three bodies of a Buddha in an onomatopoeic word play.<sup>91</sup> This style is accompanied by punning, directness, and word play, as seen in all four dialogues.

<sup>85</sup> Jäschke (1995): '1. A sort of coarse and thick grass of inferior quality. 2. a fragrant grass. 3. *'jag rgod* = horse tail.' Goldstein (2001): 'A thin grass to make brooms and thatching.' mKhan po Nges don comments that *spu 'jag* is here to be understood as one word meaning: 'single hair'. So far not other reference for this assertion could be located.

<sup>86</sup> Goldstein (2001): 'bedding, hon. for *'bog = gzims 'bog* = One word, hon. for "bedding".' According to mKhan po Nges don it is a kind of mattress filled with some sort of animal hair.

<sup>87</sup> Taking the verb *yin* from the end and referring to the other clauses as well. One may also think of an *tshang ba yin* '... is complete'. The word play of *chos sku* is not entirely clear: Either it is the *ka dag* which is referred to or it may be the 'body of phenomena' and hint at the bodily appearance of the hair.

<sup>88</sup> *Longs pe 'dug*. mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, Dec 2007) A colloquialism from Kham which can be considered roughly equivalent to the modern *lang gi 'dug*.

<sup>89</sup> *sprul sprul* is most likely an onomatopoeic reduplication. The meaning of *sprul* is here like *sprug*, as it appears that forced by the previous word play (and not by misspelling) the author is using *sprul* which is also part of the Tibetan word *sprul sku* ('emanation body', Skt: *nirmāṇakāya*). The Tibetan has a connective particle (*'brel sgra*) after the 'wind' (*rlung*). One may either amend the connective to an ergative marker (as usually demanded by *tha dad pa* voluntary verb *byed pa* and referring to the understood subject-like argument *spu de ka*), or consider the connective as interchangeable with the ergative (which sometimes occurs in texts). Or one may read it as connective, interpreting the phrase *sprul sprul 'byed pa* as a nominalisation connected to the noun *rlung* forming the whole nominalisation 'the making of movement of the wind'. In that case, however, one would omit the understood *spu de ka*. It was therefore translated as 'moved by the wind'.

<sup>90</sup> A *khu A khra*, fol. 32a (p. 95): *gzims 'bog gyi spu 'jag btogs nas phyag tu bsams nas/ sku gsum 'di la tshang ba yin gsung/ ci ltar tshang ba yin zhus pas/ spu de ka chos sku yin pas chos sku/ longs pe 'dug pas longs sku/ rlung gi* [read *gis?*, see note 88 above] *sprul sprul byed pa sprul sku yin gsungs/*.

<sup>91</sup> The Tibetan verb 'to stand' (*longs*), for example, corresponds to a part of the Tibetan word (with a different meaning) for *saṃbhogakāya* (short: *longs sku*).

### 5.2.6 Conceptualisation and Dharmakāya

The closer examination supports the previously stated reasons for inserting the dialogues at precisely this place in the narrative, suggesting that these embedded passages embody the narratological function of portraying the Eighth Karmapa as a realised teacher, particularly so in the Great Seal (and 'nature of mind' teachings). It is worth noticing that all dialogues take part in proximity to the passages addressing the issue of the other Karmapa-candidate. The dialogues operate through the narrative technique of showing (as opposed to telling), leaving no doubt about the Karmapa's capacity to give advice on advanced practices.

The texts can further be regarded as a vehicle for instructions on the nature of mind for the reader via the means of dialogue, a device popular in the Buddhist but also in other traditions.<sup>92</sup> This supports the view of the spiritual biography genre, at least in part, consisting of instruction.<sup>93</sup>

With regard to historical questions about the authenticity and origin of the dialogues, additional sources are scarce and one is left to careful speculation. Given the detail the source reserved for other events, it is unlikely that the entire dialogues were wholly imagined by the author, A khu a khra, (or any other compiler) without any related event. As a Karmapa, even a very young one, his every word and deed were seen to convey religious purpose. The not so elaborate terminology supports that the composition of the dialogues derives inspiration from an early interaction of the young Karmapa. In that case, A khu a khra probably witnessed these or similar events and made notes (*zin bris*) at some stage.<sup>94</sup>

On the other hand, A khu a khra, as former secretary of the Seventh and attendant of the Eighth Karmapa, had a strong agenda to picture this boy as an authentic teacher. This interlocks with the narratological analysis; the Karmapa's young age further raising doubts.<sup>95</sup> It is improbable that the dialogues were noted down in the teaching situation and are a close record of the Eighth Karmapa's words. Historical truth may lie in between these

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<sup>92</sup> Keller (1978: 89–90) considers dialogues (and instructions) typical genres in mystical writings. In the Indian Mahāyāna traditions, the debate-like dialogue (*pūrvapakṣa*) is quite common. Dialogues are also found in the Zen works (Beyer 1974: 264), in the writings of Śāṅkāra's *Upadeśasāhasrī* (Hacker 1949), and the Persian mystic Rūmī (Keller 1978: 89–92).

<sup>93</sup> Willis (1995: 5) and Chapter Three (3.3).

<sup>94</sup> For A khu a khra and the circumstances of this text as noted in this section, see Chapter Three (3.4).

<sup>95</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1225, calls him *dpon chen* of the Seventh Karmapa.

possibilities. Given their doctrinal and rhetorical similarity, it can at least be assumed that the dialogues stem from a single author.<sup>96</sup>

These speculations notwithstanding, their doctrines offer clues for how the Great Seal was perceived to have been taught by the Eighth Karmapa. Though not explicitly stated, all dialogues revolve around teachings about the nature of mind and are rooted in the rhetoric of immediacy. The recognition of the nature of mind as *the* liberating insight is clearly put forward along with instructing conceptualisation as *dharmakāya*, bearing similarities to the tradition of sGam po pa. It seems that the Great Seal as liberating insight is considered crucial for the practice of the Six Doctrines of Nāropa (dialogue three), indicating the over-arching importance of the essential Great Seal teaching, which was ascribed to Maitrīpa.<sup>97</sup>

Strikingly, three of the four dialogues employ a similar metaphor for pointing out the sameness of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, bodily parts of a dog are viewed as an expression of enlightened mind. Taking into account the rhetorical and doctrinal similarity of the dialogues, it can be concluded that the doctrinal content does not clearly depend on the addressee, but represents a relatively coherent doctrinal layer. What seems to depend on the recipient is the varying approach to the topic. And the 'doctrinal layer' is more a way of instructing that attempts to point out the essence of thoughts, and ordinary appearances as *dharmakāya*, in other words: enlightenment.

### 5.3 Answer to Gling drung pa's Query on the Great Seal<sup>98</sup>

It was mentioned previously that question and answer texts (*dris lan*) document a *written* exchange on various doctrinal issues as opposed to a dialogue or conversation. The *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan* (Answer to a Question Asked by Gling drung pa La 'dor ba) is such an exchange,

<sup>96</sup> Although the time of composition, redaction, and transmission of the text remains vague, the Eighth Karmapa's own title list, from 1546, indicates that the text was already complete by that year (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 5a/p. 358). The other contemporary sources rely heavily on this text as source, but the dialogues did not find entry into them, apparently not deemed crucially important for the general outline of the Karmapa's life.

<sup>97</sup> This shift probably took place during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Jackson, D. 1994: 82–84; see Chapter Two (2.1.3)).

<sup>98</sup> The same but slightly differently presented discussion of this *dris lan* is supplied in Jim Rheingans, 'The Eighth Karmapa's Answer to Gling drung pa: A Case Study', *Mahāmudrā and the Bka'-brgyud Tradition: PIATS 2006: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies Bonn*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein and Roger R. Jackson (IITBS: Halle, 2010), 345–386.

presenting remarkable doctrinal and historical details centring around the criticism of Sa skya Paṇḍita and the distinction of tantra and the Great Seal.

### 5.3.1 *The Addressee and Other Contexts*

To date, only the version of the text published in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* is available.<sup>99</sup> It is not that easy to understand the exact context of this work and to identify the recipient, but slightly more rewarding than in most of the dialogues. The title on the title page reads *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, and the name of the recipient appears here as *Gling drung pa La 'dor ba*. Whereas the name mentioned in the first lines of the text reads *Gling A mdong Drung pa*,<sup>100</sup> the entry listed in the *dkar chag* of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa reads *Gling drung pa a mdong pa'i dris lan* (*Answers to Questions of Gling drung A mdong pa*).<sup>101</sup>

As the editors of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* were imprecise at other times, the title in the much older *dkar chag* is more reliable, the name being *Gling drung A mdong pa*. This is further supported by the first line of the text itself, which is a variation rather than a misspelling.<sup>102</sup>

*Gling* or *Gling tshang*, the place of the questioner as expressed by the name, is a designation of an Eastern Tibetan kingdom.<sup>103</sup> In the spiritual biographies about the Eighth Karmapa, two slightly contradictory referenc-

<sup>99</sup> As has been pointed out above, the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* contain some misspellings. The supplement to the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* talks about various sources for the publication. The *dris lan* probably stems from two versions of manuscripts stored in 'Bras spungs (1a), manuscripts from the Po ta la (1b) of the 'Bras spungs manuscripts, or the more obscure category of 'whatever writings and prints that were found in dBus and gTsang' (Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 6: *kham dbus kyi bris dpar ci rig rnyed pa rnams*). See Chapter Three (3.2).

<sup>100</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 1b.

<sup>101</sup> *dkar chag*, fol. 5b (p. 9).

<sup>102</sup> The elements of the name are three: place (i), title (ii), and further specification (iii), probably of place of origin. Looking at the first reading, we find *Gling* as the place (i), *Drung* as a title (ii), and 'He of La 'dor' (*la 'dor ba'i*) as a further specification (iii). The third version has as specification (iii) 'He of A mdong' and thus deviates slightly. The second version merely puts the title (ii), *Drung*, to the third element of the name and has as second element again 'He of A mdong' (*A mdong pa*). Thus the actual variation consists of *A mdong pa* versus *La 'dor ba*, which are probably two scribal attempts at writing what was originally one name.

<sup>103</sup> Geographically, it is an older name of what would later become the kingdom of sDe dge and is still the name of the nomadic areas north of sDe dge. Between 1400 and 1637 the *Gling tshang* ruled over large areas in Eastern Tibet (Kessler 1983: 17).

es indicate that the Karmapa travelled to the area and passed on teachings to members of the Gling family in the year 1519. With regard to major events of the Eighth Karmapa's life, this was the last of three years he trained under his revered main teacher, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa bKra shis dpal 'byor, and, probably together with this master, travelled around in Eastern Tibet.<sup>104</sup>

The *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* states that he had a vision of Nāgārjuna and was then 'invited by Gling drung pa gTing 'od pa,<sup>105</sup> uncle and nephew, and went to Zil mdar.'<sup>106</sup> There he was offered presents and it is further said that he gave 'prophecies and letters' (*lung bstan dang chab shog*) to a lCags mo kun ting Go shri, as well as 'prophecies and instructions' (*lung bstan dang gdams pa*) to a Gling drung pa.

The later source, Si tu and 'Be lo's *Kaṃ tshang*, recounts the events in a different manner. It says—at a similar place within the narrative—that the Eighth Karmapa was invited by the Gling tshang ruling family. He then had a vision of Nāgārjuna in Tsi nang and spent a month in Ba zi mdo.<sup>107</sup> Then he went to the mGo zi hermitage and imparted many 'prophecies' (*lung bstan*) to a Gling drung pa gTing 'dzin bzang po.<sup>108</sup>

Though in general the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* is the older and more detailed source, it is assumed that Si tu's statements about geography are more accurate.<sup>109</sup> At least later, mGo zi (or Guzi) in North West sDe dge was a site of a Ngor pa monastery.<sup>110</sup> The monastery in Zil mdar or mGo zi

<sup>104</sup> See Chapter Four (4.1.4).

<sup>105</sup> Probably short for gTing ['dzin] 'od [zer] pa.

<sup>106</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1233: *gling drung pa ting 'od pa khu dbon gyi spyang drangs/ zil mdar phebs/ khri rwa can gyi 'bul ba dang dbon gyi thog drangs pa'i gra pa yang brgya lhaq phul/ der [p. 1234] lcags mo kun ting go'i sri 'od zer rgyal mtshan pa la 'das ma 'ongs kyi lung bstan chab shog gnang/ gling drung pa la lung bstan dang gdams pa gnang/ tsher phur drung pa grub thob pa la dus 'khor 'grel chen gzan pa na dus kyi 'khor lo dang rje mi la gzigs pa rje grub thob pa la thim par gzigs nas bstod par mdzad/.*

<sup>107</sup> This is probably Si tu's version of the *zil mdar* in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*.

<sup>108</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 316: *gling tshang gyi gdan drangs/ tsi nang du 'phags pa klu grub zhal gzigs/ ba zis mdor zla gcig bzugs/ mgo zi ri khrod du phebs Gling drung pa gting 'dzin bzang por lung bstan mang po mdzad.*

<sup>109</sup> Looking at the differences in the two sources examined above, it has to be taken into account that (i) Si tu and 'Be lo may have had access to two early sources, which are lost to date (Chapter Three (at the end of 3.4)), and (ii) that Si tu was from sDe dge and was well acquainted with this region and its history.

<sup>110</sup> The Si tu incarnation prior to Si tu Paṇ chen had been born into the family of the Ngor pa patrons (written communication, D. Jackson, June 2007). For the Ngor pa, see also Jackson, D. (1989b).

was most likely the bKra shis rnam rgyal monastery of the Gling drung pa, mentioned once in a *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* as among the monasteries in which the Karmapa erected buildings.<sup>111</sup> The question remains, whether the two Gling drung pas mentioned in the two sources, Gling drung pa gTing 'dzin bzang po and Gling drung pa gTing 'dzin 'od zer, are two different persons or whether the difference constitutes a name variation. Furthermore, which one among them can be identified with the unspecified Gling drung pa mentioned a second time in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*? Most importantly, who was Gling drung A mdong pa, the addressee of this text?

While the title of this work is mentioned in the *dKar chag* of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, it is not included in the list of the Eighth Karmapa, dated 1546.<sup>112</sup> The presence of the title in the list of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa proves that a text with such a title existed. The colophon of the *dris lan* itself bears no date:

.... he, who only sees a fraction of the Great Seal of bKa' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje, Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje, sent this to mDo khams. May through the virtue of that all beings become liberated by means of the Great Seal!<sup>113</sup>

The traditional deferential 'who only sees a fraction of the Great Seal' points to the Eighth Karmapa as the author. The colophon also indicates that the *Answer to Gling drung pa* was a written teaching or a letter (as opposed to the student making notes in a teaching situation) composed by the Karmapa somewhere in dBus and sent to mDo khams (where the student presumably received it).

A plausible option would be that the answer was written after 1546, and did therefore not find entry into the Karmapa's title list. Only after the Eighth Karmapa's passing were all documents related to the teaching of the revered master assembled by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa and compiled into a collection.<sup>114</sup> The work would then stem from a period of the Eighth Karmapa at his height of scholarship and teaching.

<sup>111</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* fol. 10b (p. 369): *Gling drung pa bkra shis rnam rgyal gyi sde*.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 4a–9b (pp. 356–367).

<sup>113</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 3b: *bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje ba'i phyag chen gyi phyogs mthong tsaṃ zhig karma pa mi bskyod rdo rjes mdo khams su brdzangs pa'i dge bas 'gro kun phyag chen gyis grol bar gyur cig*.

<sup>114</sup> The other option would be that the text was authored earlier but only gathered and inserted into the collection at a later point by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa.

It is known that the Karmapa first visited Gling drung around 1519, yet the answer was probably written after 1546. Presuming there is no thirty year gap between question and answer, a reasonable assumption is that the recipient of this text, Gling drung A mdong pa, came from the milieu of the other Gling drung pa mentioned in the spiritual biographies, and is most likely a relative or nephew of those. Perhaps the Gling tshang lords were devoted to the Ngor pa already at that time.<sup>115</sup>

Neither of the Gling drung pas is mentioned among the lists of students found in the spiritual biographies about Mi bskyod rdo rje. It is thus probable that he did not belong to the closest bKa' brgyud pa students of the Eighth Karmapa but, as his question reveals, he had received Sa skya pa and Ngor pa teachings, and also considered the Karmapa as his teacher or at least a competent scholar. It was pointed out in Chapter Four that Mi bskyod rdo rje taught the graded tantra path only from his twenty-seventh year onwards to a restricted number of individuals.<sup>116</sup> If one deems the content of the *dris lan* as at least in part belonging to this category, one can assume a sincere teacher-student relationship between Gling drung pa and the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>117</sup>

### 5.3.2 The Content

The one question directly addresses the key issue in the debates about the Great Seal:<sup>118</sup>

I will answer [the question that] Gling A 'dong Drung pa from Khams has asked:

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<sup>115</sup> A further indication of Mi bskyod rdo rje's relation to the Gling tshang lords is his letter *rGyal chen gling pa ma bu la gnang ba'i chab shog* (not containing the name Gling drung pa). The assumption about the Ngor pa is based on the question asked.

<sup>116</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i mam thar*, fol. 6a/p. 340. See Chapter Four (4.3).

<sup>117</sup> The *dris lan* contains tantric teachings in distinguishing the tantras (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 1b, see below), but is mainly about the Great Seal of sGam po pa. The Great Seal was, as noted above, taught also at an early stage in the Karmapa's life and is not considered a tantric exposition. But we may still assume that it was taught only to worthy students. The question, tone, and content of the *dris lan* further supports the idea that Gling drung pa was a student of the Karmapa, though—as will be discussed below—to precisely determine their relationship, along with the political circumstances, may substantially contribute to an understanding of the contents.

<sup>118</sup> See Chapter Two (2.1.3).



'Are the two, the meaning of the fourth empowerment of the unsurpassable mantra as held by the glorious Sa skya pas<sup>119</sup> and the meaning of the Great Seal as taught by bKa' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje, the same or different? Is there a difference between them as to higher and lower?'<sup>120</sup>

In his answer, the Karmapa first explains the meaning of the fourth empowerment according to what he had heard from 'some lamas' of the Sa skya Ngor branch, probably alluding to the questioner's background.<sup>121</sup> They would maintain that one blocks out conceptual objects, concentrating on the self-empty essence of the feeling of joy resulting from the third empowerment. But he admits not being completely sure about the definition of the Ngor pa.<sup>122</sup>

He then goes on to outline what he considers a more general view on the matter; namely that, in general (*spyir*), there are two kinds of empowerment in the *\*niruttara-tantra*, 'mundane' (*'jig rten pa*) and 'supramundane' (*'jig rten las 'das pa*). The *Kālacakratantra* would be the only tantra belonging to the supramundane category:

Because in the father tantras, such as the cycles of Guhyasamāja and Yamantāka, and in all the mother tantras, such as *Cakrasaṃvara[tantra]* and *Hevajra[tantra]*, there is taught nothing [else] than the four empowerments of the world, therefore the Vajradhara who will be accomplished through the creation- and completion-stages of these [tantras] is a surpassable (*bla bcas pa*) Vajradhara.<sup>123</sup>

The Karmapa explains that the *karma*- and *jñāna-mudrā* of the third empowerment used for achieving the fourth empowerment are those for obtaining the worldly *siddhi*.<sup>124</sup> What is reached with these mundane em-

<sup>119</sup> 'Unsurpassable' (*bla med*) refers to the unsurpassable *yoga-tantra*, the *\*niruttara-yoga-tantra*.

<sup>120</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 1b (p. 312): *dir khams nas gling a 'dong drung pas/ dpal sa skya pas 'dod pa'i sngags bla med kyi dbang bzhi pa'i don dang/ bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje pa'i bzhed pa'i phyag rgya chen po'i don gnyis gcig gam mi gcig/ /de la mchog dman yod med ji ltar yin zhes drir byung ba la/ lan brjod par ba ste/*.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.: *gsang 'dus 'jigs byed gshed skor sogs pha rgyud/ bde dgyes sogs ma rgyud thams cad nas* [fol. 2a/p. 313] *'jigs rten pa'i dbang bzhi las ma bstan pas/ de dag gi bskyed rdzogs kyi lam gyis sgrubs pa'i rdo rje 'chang yang bla bcas pa'i rdo rje 'chang yin pa'i phyir te*.

<sup>124</sup> To determine the actual meaning of the teachings in this passage, more specific research is needed, which would exceed the scope of the present thesis. A part of the context will be provided in Chapter Six (6.3). The passage here is nevertheless paraphrased roughly to give an impression of the Karmapa's red thread in his answer and seems to be in line with some of his other works. As a first indication, similar teachings can be found in the bulky *sKu*

powerments is also called 'inferior Vajrasattva' (*rdo sems nyi tshe ba*). Only with the supramundane empowerments from the Kālacakra will one attain the ultimate goal: the 'pervading Vajrasattva' (*khyab pa'i rdo sems*). In this system, the third empowerment bringing forth the ultimate wisdom of the Great Seal (the fourth empowerment), is not mixed with the worldly *siddhis*. Through this Great Seal of the extraordinary primordial Buddha (Tib. *dang po'i sangs rgyas*, Skt. *ādibuddha*) the Great Seal itself (*phyag rgya chen po nyid*) is brought to accomplishment.<sup>125</sup> The discussion on the first part of the answer is summed up:

Therefore, concerning the supramundane fourth empowerment which comes from the *Kālacakra[tantra]* and the fourth empowerment, which comes from [tantras] such as *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Guhyasamāja*, there is higher (the former) and lower (the latter); what the authorities on tantra mention (*smra bar byed pa*) when saying [thus] is that, which exists for the tantras as conceptual objects of [verbally expressed] knowledge.<sup>126</sup>

Thus, the Karmapa has set out to answer the question by first differentiating how he understands the fourth empowerment, emphasising the superiority of the Kālacakra-system.<sup>127</sup> But he has not yet touched upon the Great Seal

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*gsun ngo sprod*, which the Eighth Karmapa began to compose in mTshur phu in 1548, and completed in the same year in Thob rgyal dgra 'dul Gling in gTsang. Here the term 'surpassable Buddha' (*bla bcas kyi sangs rgyas*) is used to indicate the result of practising tantras not belonging to the *anuttara* class (vol. 21, fol. 236b/p. 469). The Karmapa also explains that there are mundane and supramundane empowerments within the Kālacakra system, leading to different results, again using the same term (vol. 21, fol. 345a/p. 668). Mi bskyod rdo rje uses a similar line of argument with mundane and supramundane empowerments and quote of Saraha, saying how the view and realisation (*lta ba dang rtogs pa*) of the Great Seal, which is the *buddhagarbha*, the naturally pure *dhātu*, would be beyond those objects known by mundane ultimate awareness (*ye shes*) (*dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung*, fol. 45aff./p. 555). At the end of his ritual for Kālacakra practice, the Eighth Karmapa praises it as the 'ultimate vehicle' (*bCom ldan 'das dpal dus kyi 'khor lo*, fol. 117b/p. 617: *mthar thug gyi theg pa*). It will be necessary to, in the future, evaluate Mi bskyod rdo rje's commentary on Kālacakra *bCom ldan 'das dang po'i sangs rgyas*, and tantric works of the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (see also Schaeffer 1995) as well as Bu ston.

<sup>125</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 2a (p. 313).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. fol. 2b (p. 314): *des na dus kyi 'khor lo nas 'byung ba'i 'jig rten las 'das pa'i dbang bzhi pa dang/ bde gsang sogs nas 'byung ba'i dbang bzhi pa la mchog dman yod ces rgyud sde mkhan po rnam smra bar byed pa ni shes bya spyi pa la rgyud yod pa'i de yin/*. For the last slightly cryptic passage, one would expect and read *par rgyu la yod pa*. It is assumed from the context that the statement means, that Karmapa and other scholars accept this distinction.

<sup>127</sup> The Kālacakra-system is often viewed as the pinnacle of tantra; a corresponding passage in *Kālacakratāntra*, V. 243: 'In every kind of tantras, the Vajrin concealed the vajra-word, and in the Ādibuddha, he taught it explicitly and in full for the sake of the liberation of

of the bKa' brgyud pa, which is the main concern of the questioner. In the following he introduces it as that of sGam po pa:

The Great Seal of the bKa' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje cannot be harmonised with the question as either the same or different from the supramundane and mundane fourth empowerment from the tantra scriptures. The 'Bri gung pa 'Jig rten gsum gyi mgon po has said: 'Beyond the four joys, something different from the clear light (*'od gsal*), untouched by the three great ones.'<sup>128</sup> The Great Brahmin (Saraha), too, has said:<sup>129</sup> 'the innate natural (*gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa*) Great Seal, the meaning of the *dohā*, cannot be realised through the fourth empowerment.' And in the *dMangs dohā* [he has said:]

'Some have entered the explanation of the sense of the fourth [empowerment], some understand [it] as the element of space (*nam mkha'i kham*s),<sup>130</sup> others make it a theory of emptiness;<sup>131</sup> hence, mostly [people] have entered what is incompatible<sup>132</sup> [with it].'<sup>133</sup>

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living beings. Therefore, Sucandra, the splendid Ādibuddhatantra, a discourse of the supreme lord of Jinās, is the higher, more comprehensive and complete tantra than the mundane and supramundane [tantras]' (translation by Wallace 2000: 6).

<sup>128</sup> The Karmapa quotes the same saying by the 'Bri gung pa in his *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* (fol. 6b). Ruegg (1988: 1259, n. 43) has noted that other 'Bri gung pa *dgong gcig*-texts interpret it as referring to *dbu ma chen po*, *phyag rgya chen po*, and *rdzogs pa chen po*. This refers to dBon po Shes rab 'byung gnas, *Dam chos dgongs pa gcig pa'i gzhung*, fol. 5a; and Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Dam pa'i chos dgongs pa gcig pa'i mam bshad*, fol. 36a ff. (see also Karmay 1988: 197, n. 95). The *chen po gsum* here are not related to the three *mudrā*, e.g. *karma*-, *dharma*-, and *samayamudrā* as opposed to the *mahāmudrā* (*rGya gzhung*, vol. oṃ, p. 571).

<sup>129</sup> *Dohākoṣa* 12 (Jackson, R. 2004). The whole complex in Saraha's *Dohākoṣa* is a refutation first of non-Buddhists, then Hīnayāna (10), Mahāyāna (11), and Mantrayāna (11ff.) (Schaeffer 2000: ad loc.).

<sup>130</sup> Tib. *nam mkha'i* = Apabhraṃśa: *āāsa* or *gaāṇa*; Tib. *kham*s = Apabhraṃśa: *bhūa* (Tilopa 1, 1a in Jackson, R. 2004).

<sup>131</sup> Note the textual variants given by Schaeffer (2000 esp. app. crit. on 48: AA = Advaya Avadhūti, *Do ha mdzod kyi snying po'i don gyi glu'i 'grel pa*): *gzhan dang stong pa nyid lta bar byed pa de*; L (*Do ha mdzod* prepared by Lha btsun pa Rin chen rgyal mtshan): *lta bar byed pa ste*.

<sup>132</sup> *Mi mthun phyogs*. This part of the verse is only available in Tibetan. The translation 'contradiction', favoured by both Schaeffer (2000: 277) and Jackson, R. (2004: 12) could be also understood differently (also Shahidullah 1928: 129 *ad stanza* 11). Because *mi thun phyogs* = Old Bengali/Maithili *bipakṣa* (cf. *Caryāgītī* 16 [Mahitta], 4d Kværne 1977:142: *re bipakṣa kobī na dekhī*); Munidatta ad loc. *punaḥ kleśam vipakṣi-karīṇaṃ na paśyati* (Kværne 1977: 144: Tib.: *mi mthun phyogs bye dpa mi mthong ba'o*). This suggests a meaning such as 'obstacle' which was here translated as 'not compatible with it'. Still *vipakṣa* could also have the Indian logical meaning of counter-example or counter-argument: 'By maintaining this (emptiness) they provide a counter-argument for the non-conceptual state of awareness.' Interpreting it as 'contradiction', Shahidullah (1928) has 'propositions contradictory' and 'the contrary' (cf. Udayana [eleventh century], *Ātmātattvaviveka*, Laine 1998: 74). For *sapakṣa*—*vipakṣa* as Indian /Buddhist logical

Mi bskyod rdo rje avoids classifying sGam po pa's Great Seal as tantra or not. Then he interprets Saraha's term 'the fourth' (*bzhi pa*) as the fourth empowerment, suiting his purpose to prove the fourth empowerment as not necessarily in accordance with the Great Seal.<sup>134</sup> The Karmapa finally imparts what he considers the key point of the Great Seal, again putting it forward as that of sGam po pa.

In that case, as for the Great Seal upheld by the bKa' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje: in the great timeless (*ye*) freedom from the impurity of experience, realisation, view, and meditation of the four mundane and supramundane empowerments and so forth, one settles in the unfabricated *om sva re*<sup>135</sup> while it [the Great Seal] appears spontaneously as the primordial Buddha, the timeless presence itself!<sup>136</sup>

The strong term 'impurity' (*dri ma*) denotes the meditation achieved by empowerments, and is juxtaposed with the simple, effortless, resting in the mind's true nature—a classic statement of the rhetoric of immediacy. This time the Karmapa sets the Great Seal of the bKa' brgyud apart from the tantric empowerments and their practices. This point is emphasised with anti-ritualistic rhetoric:<sup>137</sup>

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terms, see Ram-Prasad (2002: 345–6: 'homologue'); Ganeri (2003: 38: 'heterologue'); Barnhart (2001: 557: 'example and counter-example/counter-positive example'); Staal (1962) (according to Ram-Prasad 2002: 346): 'logical equivalence through contraposition'. Shaw (2002: 216) has *pakṣa* = 'locus of inference'.

<sup>133</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 2b (p. 314): *bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje ba'i phyag rgya chen po ni rgyud sde las 'byung ba'i 'jig rten dang 'jig rten las 'das pa'i dbang bzhi pa dang gcig mi gcig bstun tu yod pa min te/ 'jig rten gsum gyi mgon po 'bris khung pas/ dga' ba bzhi las 'das pa/ 'od gsal las khyad par du gyur pa/ /chen po gsum gyis ma reg pa zhes gsungs pa ste/ bram ze chen po sa ra has kyang gnyug ma lhan cig skes pa phyag rgya chen po do ha'i don ni dbang bzhis pas rtogs par mi nus zhes dmangs do har/ /la la bzhi pa'i don 'chad pa la zhugs/ la la nam mkha'i khams la rtogs par byed/ gzhan dag stong nyid lta bar byed pa ste/ phal cher mi mthun phyogs la zhugs pa yin/ zhes 'byung ba'i phyir/.*

<sup>134</sup> In this interpretation he follows the thirteenth century Tibetan writer bCom ldan ral gri, alias Rig pa'i ral gri; see Schaeffer (2000: 276).

<sup>135</sup> According to mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, August 2007), it is a colloquialism occasionally used by lamas even today, meaning: 'leave it as it is/it is just that'.

<sup>136</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 2b (p. 314): *'o na bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje ba'i bzhed pa'i phyag rgya chen po ni/ 'jig rten dang 'jig rten las 'das pa'i dbang bzhi sogs kyi nyams rtogs lta grub kyi dri ma dang ye bral chen por gdod nas* [fol. 3a/p. 315] */ye bzhus nyid ye sangs rgyas su lhun gyis grub par 'char ba la ma bcos om sva re 'jog pa las/.*

<sup>137</sup> Mathes (2006: 207) has concluded that the Indian material on Saraha takes a sceptical stand towards 'traditional forms of Buddhism including Tantra'. See also Schaeffer (2000: 7) and Jackson, R. (2004: 19–20).

Apart from that [settling the mind as stated above], there is [no way] that one will realise the accomplishment of the Great Seal through tiresome [activities] such as to go and ask for empowerment, to ring the bell, to recite [mantra] while meditating on a Buddha aspect, and to collect yam-wood and make fire offerings; or to carry out an [extensive] meditation ritual after having collected offering [substances].<sup>138</sup>

The Karmapa had, however, not yet explicitly answered whether the fourth empowerment of the Sa skya pa or the Great Seal could be considered superior. This question is touched upon by recounting a story from the period of earlier masters in the twelfth century, which also forms the end of this text.

When formerly the glorious Phag mo gru went into the presence of the Sa skya pa Kun [dga'] snying [po], [Phag gru] acted as local tutor (*gnas slob*)<sup>139</sup> for Khams pa sBas mchod and [Phag mo gru] attended the Bla ma [sBas mchod] as not different from the Sa skya pa.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 3a (p. 315): *de la dbang bskur zhur 'gro ba dang/ dril bu 'khrol ba dang/ lha bsgoms nas bzlas pa dang/ yam shing bsags nas spyin bsreg bya ba sogs dang/ 'bul sdud byas nas sgrub mchod 'dzugs pa sogs kyi ngal bas phyag rgya chen po'i dngos grub sgrub pa ma lags/*

<sup>139</sup> Zhang Yisun: *gnas kyi slob dpon* = 'local teacher' (also *gnas sbyin pa'i slob dpon* = 'teacher that gives lodging') – '*dul ba las bshad pa'i slob dpon lnga'i nang gses/ gnas 'cha' ba'i slob ma la dgag sgrub gnam gsum gyi bslab bya slob par byed pa'i dge slong*'. This is one of the five teachers for monks as mentioned in the Vinaya. Mi bskyod rdo rje himself, in his Vinaya commentary, considers *gnas kyi slob dpon* = *gnas kyi bla ma* one of the five teachers explained in the Vinaya, his role being to assist the monk in the three trainings and see to his pure and stable conduct ('*Dul ba mdo rtsa rgya cher 'grel*, fol. 133b) and being the one who directly engages with the student in the dharma (ibid. fol. 191b). The question is (see note 138 below) whether we are dealing with the formal sense of the word as a teacher of the newcomer monk, or rather a senior teacher introducing a visiting monk to a monastery. *Bod skad dang legs byar tshig mdzod chen mo: gnas byin pa - niśrayadāyakaḥ*, from *Mahāvīyutpattiḥ*, 8731 (also *niśrayadāpikaḥ*, *niśrayadāpakaḥ*) 'he that gives lodging'.

<sup>140</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 3a (p. 315) (Tibetan text, see below, note 141). From the context one would read: '[Sa chen] made sBas mchod the *gnas slob* [for Phag gru].' The passage requires some discussion, because the grammar and the context suggest contradictory readings. Grammatically, it would be most likely that Phag gru (being in the phrase before, marked with the absolutive as the argument, one would call 'subject' in indo-european languages of the verb *byon*), made the *gnas slob* for sBas mchod as marked by the dative. Alternatively, but less likely, Sa chen could have been acting as *gnas slob* for sBas mchod. From the next clause (*sa skya pa dang khyad med du bla mar bsten*), and bearing in mind the context of the story (see also the further works by Phag mo gru pa discussed below), however, it is clear that it was the sBas mchod whom Phag gru attended as not different from the Sa skya pa. The *gnas slob* is normally the monk who introduces the newcomer to the monastery (see note above and e-mail communication, D. Jackson, August 2007). It seems thus that Khams pa sBas mchod acted as Phag mo gru pa's *gnas slob*; meaning he acted as his personal preceptor, the senior monk who takes responsibility for a junior monk. This again is grammatically unlikely

Later, Phag mo gru pa went into the presence of the Master (*rje*) sGam po pa. He completely let go of the experience of the Great Seal of the fourth empowerment [which he had received] from the Sa skya pa and actualised the Great Seal of Dwags po Lha rje and his bKa' brgyud [lineage], the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*).

At that time, Sa chen passed away and Khams pa sBas mchod went to Khams. The talk of the Sugata Phag gru being fully awakened (*sangs rgyas pa*) came up in Khams and sBas mchod [went] to Sugata Phag gru [and] requested the instructions of the Great Seal, saying:

'[You] must grant me the instruction which [made] you a Buddha, the Great Seal.'

In answer [to that he says] in the *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnanng ba* (*Granting the Innate Union of the Great Seal*), which is to be found in the *bka' 'bum* of Sugata Phag gru:

'As far as I am concerned, my trust in you and the great Sa skya pa is the same. Therefore it would not be right if I taught you the Great Seal; nevertheless, since I cannot bear if someone like you falls into a mistaken path, I must by all means offer<sup>141</sup> [you] the Great Seal—so please excuse me!'

[Phag gru] said, and in fact he even did something like confessing<sup>142</sup> [a misdeed].<sup>143</sup>

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(possible with adding a *du* = *slob dpon du*, thinking of the *la* for sBas mchod as indicating the object = '[Sa chen] made sBas mchod the *gnas slob* [for Phag gru]' or '[Phag gru] made sBas mchod [his] *gnas slob*'). But Phag gru had finished his Vinaya-education by that time (1134; Schiller 2002: 62). We are left with the following possibilities: (i) The text may be corrupt or (ii) we have a particular construction and sBas mchod was indeed the *gnas slob* of Phag gru. Or, not disregarding the grammar present in the available version: (iii) Phag gru acted as *gnas slob* for sBas mchod, who was otherwise Phag gru's teacher. (iv) Sa chen himself was *gnas slob* for sBas mchod (second reading), indicating such a closeness between him and sBas mchod that Phag gru attended him as his teacher. There is also the possibility of a later addition to the story (see the following discussion in the main text).

<sup>141</sup> The polite '*bul*' is used, which indicates the respect towards sBas mchod ('offer [you] the Great Seal [teaching]'); the Tibetan double negation could also be expressed as 'I cannot refuse to'.

<sup>142</sup> *mthol bshags*. Literally: 'to admit [mistakes]' (Zhang Yisun: *mthol bshags – rang gi nyes pa mi gsang bar shod pa* 'to declare one's faults without concealing').

<sup>143</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 3a (p. 315): *sngon nas sa skya pa kun snying gi drung du dpal phag mo gru pa byon dus khams pa sbas mchod la gnas kyi slob dpon mdzad/ sa skya pa dang khyad med du bla mar bsten/ phyis phag mo gru pa rje sgam po pa'i sku mdun du phyin sngar sa skya pa'i dbang bzhi pa'i phyag rgya chen po'i nyams de drungs nas 'byin par mdzad/ bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje ba'i phyag chen tha mal gyi shes pa de mngon du mdzad/ de skabs sa chen gshegs/ khams pa sbas mchod khams su phyin/ bder gshegs phag gru sangs rgyas pa'i skad khams su byung nas spas mchod kyi bder gshegs phag gru'i sku mdun du khyed sangs rgyas pa'i gdams ngag phyag rgya chen po de la [read: nga] gnanng dgos zer nas phyag chen gyi gdams pas/ de'i lan du phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnanng ba bder gshegs phag gru pa'i*

Finally, by way of a story which appears to be a somewhat sectarian anecdote, the Karmapa gave an opinion about the main question. Part of this story may reflect the Karmapa's attitude toward Gling drung pa. Though calling the path that Khams pa sBas mchod has previously practised a 'mistaken path' (*lam log pa*) is comparatively strong language, there is a polite strand in the opening of the story, and it seems that Phag mo gru pa felt uncomfortable to teach his former tutor, apologising in the end.<sup>144</sup>

### 5.3.3 *The Story of sBas mchod: Pedagogy, History, and the Great Seal*

Upon reading the above passage, this research has found some historical questions striking. The story of sGam po pa's precepts being more profound to Phag mo gru pa than anything he had practised before, is a well known rhetoric of the bKa' brgyud pa spiritual biographies and played a role in the polemical exchange about the Great Seal.<sup>145</sup> But who was Khams pa sBas mchod? Can the Karmapa's alleged source for this story, a text by Phag mo gru pa, be located?

During his stay in Sa skya, Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170), later one of the foremost students of sGam po pa and the source of the eight minor bKa' brgyud traditions, also obtained the *lam 'bras* instructions from Sa chen Kun dga' snying po (1092–1158).<sup>146</sup> The *lam 'bras* instructions and practice—'the way along with the result' is central to the

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*bka' 'bum na yod pa de nang na/ khyed dang sa skya pa chen po la nga ni dad pa mnyam por yod pas/ ngas khyed la phyag rgya chen po bstan mi rigs [fol. 3b/p. 316] kyang khyed lta bu lam log par ltung na mi btub pas phyag chen mi 'bul ka med byung ba yin pas bzod par gsol zhes don gyis mihol bshags lta bu'ang mdzad gda' pas/.*

<sup>144</sup> It can also be speculated to whether the Karmapa felt certain unease upon writing his reply and therefore ended it with this story and the comment that Phag gru even admitted a harmful action.

<sup>145</sup> Schiller (2002: 74–75). The use of this story in teaching could be regarded as dismissing Sa skya pa attacks as jealousy about Phag mo gru pa's development with sGam po pa (Jackson, D. 1994: 108).

<sup>146</sup> Stearns (2001) has done excellent research on the early masters of the *lam 'bras* tradition, including a section on Phag mo gru pa's *lam 'bras* teaching. Schiller (2002) has worked extensively on the life of Phag mo gru pa. Both have used the historically significant Tibetan sources. The *lam 'bras* instructions and practice are central to the Sa skya tradition, and Sa chen Kun dga' snying po (1092–1158) authored eleven explanations on it (Stearns 2001: 16–26).

Sa skya tradition.<sup>147</sup> And Sa chen, being one of the foremost early Sa skya pa masters, was a practitioner and major lineage master of this meditational technique that deals with the *Hevajratantra* and with Hevajra's consort, Nairātmya. According to some sources, Phag mo gru pa was one of Sa chen's very close and most learned students, and played a major role in the earliest compilation of the *lam 'bras*.<sup>148</sup> The Sa skya pa sources tell us that he had spent approximately twelve years in Sa skya (probably 1138–1150).<sup>149</sup>

The figure of Khams pa sBas mchod surfaces in bKa' brgyud pa spiritual biographies: it seems that Phag gru met a dGe bshes dBas (sic!) in Khams (where he was born and had started his religious career) and Phag gru apparently accompanied him in 1130/31 to dBus. However, dBas eventually went back to Khams and there is no further trace of him.<sup>150</sup> Only later, a dBas mchod is mentioned among the close students of Phag gru, the only time where the same name is used as in the answer to Gling drung pa.<sup>151</sup>

A search for the Eighth Karmapa's alleged source may help to shed light on some of the issues: the *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba*, is said

<sup>147</sup> For *lam 'bras*-instruction, and the early history of the lineage of its masters in Tibet, see Stearns (2001). A brief overview of the Sa skya tradition in English is Thub bstan legs bshad rGya mtsho (1983). An essential Tibetan history is *Sa skya pa gdung rabs chen mo* by Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams.

<sup>148</sup> His notes were even considered too clear (which is not recommended for oral instructions), and were therefore placed in the library by Sa chen and named 'the library explication' (*dpe mdzod ma*). The bKa' brgyud pa source of Padma dkar po adds that he was Sa chen's most learned student (Stearns 2001: 27, 180 n. 133, 181 n. 114).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 27, 180 n. 113; Schiller (2002: 66).

<sup>150</sup> Schiller (2002: 59) has discussed various possible dates between 1127 and 1131. According to rGyal thang pa, Phag gru accompanied dGe bshes dBas chen po to dBus when he was twenty-nine years old (1138) (*dKar brgyud gser 'phreng*, p. 401), whereas Schiller using Chos kyi yes shes translates that he accompanied a dBas rDo rje chen po when he was twenty-two and they went to sTod lung rGya mar, where Phag gru spent some time with him, conducting himself in a manner 'not different from him' (*khyad med du*). But then dGe bshes dBas wanted to go back to Khams, and Phag gru, because dBas had supported him, hesitated, but stayed (*Chos rje rin po che'i rnam thar*, fol. 4af.). Most sources seem to agree that Phag gru took full ordination in 1134 in Zul phu (Schiller 2002: 62). Later Phag mo gru pa went to Sa skya. But where was dGe bshes dBas? That may lend credibility to the assumption (ii); (see note above) namely, that Phag gru may have been in Sa skya before, acting as *gnas slob* in the sense of assisting dGe bshes dBas in the monastery. Otherwise dBas was his senior. But why does he state that he had the same trust in the Sa skya pa as in dBas? Are we dealing with the same person?

<sup>151</sup> Schiller (2002: 87), who refers to dPal chen chos kyi ye shes, *Chos rje rin po che'i rnam thar*, fol. 24a.



to be in the collected writings (*bka' 'bum*) of Phag mo gru pa, but did not find entry into any of the published versions or available early lists, nor is the story found among related works on *lhan cig skyes sbyor*.<sup>152</sup> But in another section of Phag mo gru pa's *bka' 'bum* there are three letters or advices to a dGe bshes sPas, also called sPas dGe bshes Byang chub brtson 'grus.<sup>153</sup> The Karmapa's answer had introduced Khams pa sBas mchod as someone Phag mo gru pa had the same trust in as he did in Sa chen (*dad pa mnyam po*). Phag mo gru pa uses similar phrases in the instruction to sPas dGe bshes Byang chub brtson 'grus (in the earlier manuscript *Phag gru bka' 'bum* referred to as sBas dGe bshes chen po): he mentions that this lama cared for him kindly previously and he excuses himself, saying that his devotion towards the Sa skya pa and him would be the same, indicating that he had formerly acted as his teacher.<sup>154</sup>

The second work hints at a similar relationship: the instruction Phag gru gave to a former dharma-friend (*mched grogs*), the dGe bshes dBas chen po.<sup>155</sup> Both texts contain meditation instructions, but neither of them uses explicit *phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor* precepts.

Although the *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba* quoted by the Karmapa was not found, these texts and the spiritual biographies indicate at least the existence of a dGe bshes sBas, who was Phag gru's teacher before he met sGam po pa. The dBas dGe bshes chen po mentioned in the instruction<sup>156</sup> most likely refers to the very Khams pa sBas mchod from the *dris lan*, who, as his name suggests, probably came from Khams and belonged

<sup>152</sup> During his doctoral research on Phag mo gru, Schiller has surveyed all early *dkar chag* and different editions of Phag mo gru pa's literary works and is certain that such a title does not occur (oral communication, August 2007). In a sixteenth century manuscript from 'Bri gung (*Phag gru bka' 'bum*), the *lhan cig skyes sbyor* section does not contain the title nor is the content found within these works (*Lhan cig skyes sbyor*, vol. 2, no. 8. fol. 48b.3–55a.5; *Phyag rgya chen po'i ngo sprod*, vol. 2, no. 9. fol. 55a.5–58b.3; *Lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi skor*, vol. 2, no. 10. fol. 58b.3–66a.6). See also the same corpus on *lhan cig skes sbyor* in the 2003 edition *Phag gru gsung 'bum*, vol. 4, 255–351.

<sup>153</sup> The sPas dGe bshes byang chub brtson 'grus la phag gru pas gdams pa (*Phag gru bka' 'bum: dGe bshes dbas chen po la [gdams pa]*, vol. 3, fol. 333b–334b) is most likely the same person as Khams pa sBas mchod. The *Byang chub brtson 'grus la springs pa'i nyams myong gnyis pa* (*Phag gru bka' 'bum: dGe bshes dbas chen po la spring pa*, vol. 3, fol. 270b–272a) contains a similar hint in the colophon. The *dGe bshes spas la spring ba* (*Phag gru bka' 'bum: sPas la bskur yig*, vol. 3, fol. 274b–274b) does not contain any concrete hint but could have been directed to the same individual.

<sup>154</sup> Phag mo gru rDo rje rgyal po, *sPas dGe bshes byang chub brtson 'grus*, p. 718: *bla ma sa skya pa dang khyed bzhugs pa la mos gus mnyam par mchis*.

<sup>155</sup> Phag mo gru rDo rje rgyal po, *Byang chub brtson 'grus la springs pa*, p. 381.

<sup>156</sup> Phag mo gru rDo rje rgyal po, *sPas dGe bshes byang chub brtson 'grus*, p. 718.

to the sBas clan,<sup>157</sup> as did Phag mo gru himself.<sup>158</sup> The issue with the *gnas slob*, however, remains obscure and may indeed be a later addition to the story.

Given the evidence above, it is unlikely that the Karmapa himself imagined a text called *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba* without any literary source.<sup>159</sup> It is still puzzling whether the Karmapa referred to the same instruction to sPas dGe bshes byang chub brtson 'grus under a different title or text, whether he relied on another textual source not yet found, or whether he knew of the story but paraphrased it freely.<sup>160</sup> And, as is still typical in the field of Tibetan studies, many sources have not yet become available.<sup>161</sup>

### 5.3.4 Great Seal beyond Tantra

Though some context remains to be clarified, this question and answer text bears testimony to how the Karmapa approached a polemically loaded Great Seal question from a student with probably a Ngor pa and Sa skya background and how the Karmapa adapted his instruction for this particular

<sup>157</sup> A fifteenth century encyclopaedia notes, that sPas (variants: sBa, rBa, sBas, dBa's) is a clan among the rJe cig sNyags rJe Thog sgrom rJe lineage, one of the four princely lineages of sTong. It was one of the most important in the Royal dynastic period (Gene Smith's introduction to Don dam smra ba'i seng ge, *A 15th Century Tibetan Compendium of Knowledge*, p. 16, and the Tibetan text in *ibid.* p. 183).

<sup>158</sup> It remains to be clarified how exactly their relationship was (for example what the Karmapa meant with the role as *gnas slob*), how close sBas mchod was to Sa chen and whether we are dealing with one and the same person dGe bshes dBas alias Khams pa dBas mchod. For this research, the sources on Sa chen's life have not been examined in detail. C. Stearns (e-mail communication, Sept. 2006) has not come across this name yet.

<sup>159</sup> This was a written answer by a well informed scholar, who clearly states the title and source. The Eighth Karmapa was, for example, also familiar with works of other masters of that period, such as Lama Zhang. The Karmapa transmitted the reading transmission (*lung*) of his collected writings (*Kaṇi tshang*, p. 339).

<sup>160</sup> Of course there is always the possibility that the Karmapa's *dris lan* has undergone some editing.

<sup>161</sup> It will, in the future, be important to try to validate the authenticity of this text and the associated story. Apart from the early bKa' brgyud pa sources, Mi bskyod rdo rje's teacher Karma 'phrin las pa could have served as its origin. He transmitted Phag gru's *lam 'bras* instructions to some scholars in Nalendra and must have been knowledgeable about the history of both the Sa skya and bKa' brgyud traditions (Stearns 2001: 29). For the life and works of the first Karma 'phrin las pa, see the unpublished Master's thesis, Rheingans (2004). Unfortunately his *gsung 'bum* is not complete (for a catalogue see *ibid.* 143–195) and remarks about a Khams pa sBas mchod could not yet be found in the available material.

student. As such, the work presents a window into some of the religious and political circumstances in that area and its ensuing tensions: the ambivalence of the enquirer who was probably devoted to two traditions;<sup>162</sup> his question, which almost presupposes the answer; and the anecdote within the *dris lan*, which—albeit sectarian—the Karmapa utilises to underline his opinion without *telling* it directly.<sup>163</sup>

Doctrinally, the answer first distinguishes the tantras into mundane and supramundane. Mi bskyod rdo rje then puts forward the Great Seal as a teaching impossible to call ‘either the same or different’ from the tantras, a feature emphasising its method as going beyond tantric ritual. Mi bskyod rdo rje does not present an argument here (as he does elsewhere) nor clearly state a path for Great Seal practice, apart from telling the student to let mind rest without any effort (*ma bcos*).<sup>164</sup> In that, the teaching style resembles the Karmapa's dialogues depicted above.<sup>165</sup>

He does not further label this approach in the *dris lan*, apart from presenting it as that of sGam po pa and Saraha. It seems to be in line with the approach of Saraha, and with what is termed the ‘path of direct cognition’ by sGam po pa or ‘essence Great Seal’ in the later categorisations of Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas and bKra shis chos 'phel.<sup>166</sup> It may correspond to the Eighth Karmapa's remark that, when teaching the Great Seal, he stressed the traditions of the *dohās* transmitted via Vajrapāṇi.<sup>167</sup> On

<sup>162</sup> They may have competed in the Gling area. Here, further research will have to follow up this hypothesis. Mi bskyod rdo rje's main rivals were, apparently, the dGe lugs pa and 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (1527–1592), but also some unease among the Sa skya pa's in gTsang is reported due to his disproportionate influence (cf. Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 38b).

<sup>163</sup> As in a narrative text which works with either *showing* (by means of metaphor, images etc.) or *telling* (directly relating its message) (Cobley 2001: 5–7).

<sup>164</sup> For example in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gLo bur gyi dri ma*, fol. 1b (p. 1074) and *dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung*. His argumentative strategy is a topic on its own.

<sup>165</sup> This rhetoric of the Great Seal as particular also occurs elsewhere in the instructions of Mi bskyod rdo rje. See for example Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i bshad pa rtogs brjod*, fol. 2b, where it says that the Great Seal forms the base of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa but not the all-base (*kun gyi gzhi*) of the *pāramitāyāna* nor the one of the explanatory tradition (*bshad srol*) of the general Secret Mantra, this being the special feature of Nāropa and Maitrīpa.

<sup>166</sup> See Chapter Two (2.1.1, 2.1.2). Saraha pointed out the possibility of realisation by merely relying on the kindness of one's guru (Mathes 2011; Jackson, R. 2004: 37–40, see esp. Chapter Six (6.4, 6.5)). We find the idea of a third path with sGam po pa (Sherpa 2004: 130; Jackson, D. 1994: 25–28).

<sup>167</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b (p. 367); see Chapter Four (4.3). Mi bskyod rdo rje was certainly well acquainted with the collection of Indian Great Seal works compiled

the other hand, as pointed out in the following case study, at times the Eighth Karmapa was opposed to considering the Buddhist tantras as inferior to a sūtra-based Great Seal.<sup>168</sup>

#### 5.4 Identifying the Blessing: A Mantra Path

The *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin* (Identification of the Blessing of the Great Seal), stems from the advice (*bslab bya*) section of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.<sup>169</sup> At the outset of this instruction, the Karmapa emphasises the importance of blessing (*byin rlabs*) for training in the practice of the Great Seal.<sup>170</sup> He explains his view of how to receive the blessing which one should follow, opening with the basic statement:

To my view, [the blessing] is similar to the proceeding of: the basis, union of clarity and emptiness; the path, union of the two accumulations; and the result, union of the two buddha-bodies.<sup>171</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa continues to outline the base, path, and fruition according to the tantras. How does one receive the blessing and practise the path? Under the heading of the Great Seal path (*lam phyag chen*) he first comments on the correct meditations of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, elaborating on the correct manner of practice and the experiences arising from these.

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by the Seventh Karmapa (*rgya gzhung*). His teacher Karma 'phrin las pa (1456–1539) who commented on Saraha's *dohā*-cycle, had studied the *dohā* under the Ras chung sNyan rgyud master Khrul zhig Sangs rgyas bsam grub (fifteenth century) and the Seventh Karmapa before authoring his commentary (for Karma 'phrin las pa's studies and teaching Mi bskyod rdo rje see Rheingans 2004: 61–67, 75–85; for the significance of his *dohā* commentaries see Schaeffer 2000: 9ff.). There is no explicit mention of Karma 'phrin las pa or Sangs rgyas mnyan pa transmitting Saraha's *dohā* teachings to Mi bskyod rdo rje; and the Eighth Karmapa—albeit quoting Saraha frequently—did not compose a formal commentary on the *dohā*.

<sup>168</sup> See also *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 7b (Rumtek editions); this is discussed in Chapter Six (6.4).

<sup>169</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, fol. 2a. Not much is known about the historical circumstances and the audience of this work. The first pages of the text are missing and the second part starts with a prostration to Sangs rgyas mnyan pa (ibid. fol. 1b: *Pha mnyan pa'i chen po'i zhabs la bdud*). In the colophon, the name Mi bskyod rdo rje is not mentioned. This title, however, is mentioned in both title lists (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 7b; *dKar chag*, fol. 7a). It is thus likely that the Eighth Karmapa composed this text.

<sup>170</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, fol. 2a (p. 737).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.: *nga yi go ba ltar/ gzhi gsal stong zung 'jug/ lam tshogs gnyis zung 'jug/ 'bras bu sku gnyis zung 'jug gi 'gros shig pa 'dra/*.

He suggests practising them in union (*zung 'jug*) as taught in the sūtra way, but immediately goes on to explain:

As for meditation of the Great Seal, it is the path of the unsurpassable yoga (*rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i lam*). Therefore, the special features of the quick path (*nye lam*) of the Vajrayāna need to be practised in a complete manner (*tshang bar*).<sup>172</sup>

Indeed, for him, in this text the Great Seal is both a method and a goal realised through practice of the Buddhist tantras; the fact that he comments on the general meditations of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* beforehand, implies their preliminary value to the actual tantric practice. Here, the complete practice of Vajrayāna entails receiving the four empowerments from an authentic teacher and the practice of the two stages of tantric meditation, which the Karmapa briefly describes with various examples. Thus the Great Seal, the highest accomplishment (*siddhi*), is achieved.

This should be known from the esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) of an authentic teacher. The text goes on to quote various masters on the process of tantric meditation, among others, Saraha, Nāgārjuna, and Asaṅga. The Karmapa finally explains the result of the Great Seal; namely, the state of a Vajradhara and the three Buddha-bodies. Quoting various masters, Karmapa underlines the importance of practice under the guidance of a teacher and in accordance with one's capacities, not forgetting basic contemplations.<sup>173</sup>

One needs to remember that the context indicated by the title was the blessing of the Great Seal—blessing being connected to the Vajrayāna—and this is exactly the understanding of the Great Seal he conveys.<sup>174</sup> Yet, this advice is in striking contradiction to the reply to Gling drung pa analysis previously.

This chapter has first outlined the criteria of examined texts and the rubrics of analysis for selected case studies. These have illustrated how the Eighth Karmapa guided specific students in Great Seal meditation and

<sup>172</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, fol. 3a (p. 739): *phyag rgya chen po'i sgom ni/ rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i lam yin pas/ rdo rje theg pa'i nye lam gyi khyad chos rnams tshang bar nyams su len dgos pa yin/*.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. fol. 4a (p. 740). The quotes of various masters on the process of tantric meditation are on ibid. fol. 4a–5b/p. 741–743. For the result of the Great Seal, see ibid. fol. 5b/p. 743; for the need to do Buddhist practice according to the capacities of the individual, see ibid. fol. 6b/p. 745.

<sup>174</sup> Also sGam po pa labelled the mantric paths to the Great Seal the 'path of blessing' (see Sherpa 2004: 129–37, 142–50).

expounded its theory to them. In each case the particular context was discussed as much as sources have allowed.

The first case study—dialogues about the Great Seal—has proven to be an example of an unelaborated and direct discourse about the nature of mind. It has clearly stressed the understanding of conceptualisation as, in essence, *dharmakāya*; though in quite direct, non-philosophical, language. Historical and narratological analysis have demonstrated that these dialogues may go back to events when the Eighth Karmapa was a young boy. Though the value of narratology was limited, it has complemented the investigation and helped to create a different angle of analysis, highlighting the importance of the text's function.

The second case study—the reply to Gling drung pa—has raised a key sectarian debate (the Great Seal versus the fourth empowerment of the Sa skya pa). Next to an unusual tantric distinction, it has used the 'beyond rhetoric' in emphasising Great Seal of sGam po pa and Saraha as not being 'the same or different from tantra' but somehow nevertheless 'beyond'. It has allowed insight as to how the Karmapa approached this delicate question and adapted it to the addressee. The main strategy was to tell a story. This story in turn highlighted the person of dBas mchod, a student of Phag mo gru pa, unnoticed in the academic study of the early bKa' brgyud pa history.

But 'Great Seal' was then used differently in the *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, the last case study, where it clearly designated mantric practices and their results. This divergence points to various angles of explication, possibly adapted to each disciple in a pragmatic manner.

It should be remembered that the *dris lan*, and many other minor instructions, were marginal works taught to particular individuals and must not reflect a standard view. They allowed, however, for valuable insights into teaching approaches and strategies. How far these formed a consistent doctrinal layer with other commentaries, or how far they were adapted to each addressee, remains to be clarified. Additionally, questions as to how to approach a study of the Great Seal need to be raised.



## Chapter 6

### Contextualising the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal Instructions

This chapter resolves to analyse key ideas that arose in the case studies in further sources and attempts to come to terms with the divergent interpretations discovered therein. It sets out to isolate doctrinal elements which permeate the investigated Great Seal teachings. It then turns to the teacher as crucial religious origin and means of instruction, investigating the function of confidence (*dad pa*) and devotion (*mos gus*) in some Great Seal instructions of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.1 Basic Distinctions of the Great Seal

In general, the Eighth Karmapa maintains that Great Seal instructions originate from Saraha. Saraha himself expounded on the Great Seal from the perspective of affirmation, whereas his student Nāgārjuna taught from that of negation.<sup>2</sup> In his Madhyamaka commentary, *Dwags pa'i sgrub pa'i shing rta*, the Eighth Karmapa stresses Maitrīpa's approaches as crucial for the Great Seal.<sup>3</sup> Maitrīpa's *Tattvadaśaka* and Sahajavajra's commentary *Tattvadaśakaṭīka*, along with Jñānakīrti's *Tattvāvatāra* and the songs of Saraha are employed to that end.<sup>4</sup> According to the Karmapa, Maitrīpa's

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<sup>1</sup> A further elaboration of these reflections can be found in Jim Rheingans, 'Communicating the Innate: Observations on Teacher-Student Interaction in the Tibetan Mahāmudrā Instructions,' in *Buddhist Philosophy and Meditation Practice*, ed. Khammai Dhammasami, Padmasiri de Silva, Sarah Shaw et. al. (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand: International Association of Buddhist Universities, 2012), 177–202. While the outcome of further research about Mi bskyod rdo rje's Great Seal that has just appeared (Draszczyk and Higgins 2016) improves our insights into his doctrines, the approach and thesis discussed here remains valid.

<sup>2</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Glo bur gyi dri ma*, fol. 1b (p. 1074).

<sup>3</sup> Chapter Four (4.1.6), has uncovered some conditions surrounding the composition of this important work. That he wrote it late in his life (1544/45), and the high esteem it received in his traditions, points to it being the culmination of his scholastic enterprise.

<sup>4</sup> Mathes (2006: 225). For further extensive research about Maitrīpa and the Indian background, see the pioneering work by Mathes (2015).



understanding of Madhyamaka included the teaching of Saraha the elder and younger along with Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti.<sup>5</sup> Quoting the *Tattvadaśaka*, the Karmapa comments on the verse outlining the *pāramitāyāna* pith instructions, which are to be practised adorned with the words of the guru.<sup>6</sup> The Karmapa calls Maitrīpa's understanding *amanasikāra-madhyamaka* 'non mentation Madhyamaka', distinguishing three types:

- i. Practices focusing on Mantra-Madhyamaka
- ii. Practices focusing on Sūtra-Madhyamaka
- iii. And those focusing on the Alikakāra-Cittamātra-Madhyamaka.<sup>7</sup>

The first two (i and ii) were taught by Marpa and Mi la ras pa, the second (ii) was emphasised by sGam po pa, and the third (iii) is the one of the vajra songs (*dohās*) as propagated by Vajrapāṇi of India, A su of Nepal, and Kor Ni ru pa.<sup>8</sup>

## 6.2 Interpretations of Conceptualisation as Dharmakāya

How then is the key doctrine from the dialogues of Chapter Five explained in further sources? As for the much-debated second approach (ii), which sGam po pa taught frequently, the Karmapa explains in the Madhyamaka commentary: it was labelled 'Great Seal', a name which usually denotes bliss and emptiness in the Vajrayāna. Understanding such a Madhyamaka/ Great Seal as explained by sGam po pa would be called 'actualising the

<sup>5</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6a (p. 11).

<sup>6</sup> *Tattvadaśaka* 92: *na sākāranirākāre tathatām jñātum icchataḥ/ madhyamā madhyamā caiva gurvāganalaṅkṛtā*. Mathes (2006: 209) translates: 'Somebody who wishes to know suchness for himself [finds it] neither in terms of *sakara* nor *nirakara*; Even the middle [path] (i.e., Madhyamaka) which is not adorned with the words of a guru, is only middling.' According to Mathes (2006: 213–216), the Eighth Karmapa interprets 'the words of the guru' here as those of Nāgārjuna, whereas 'Gos Lo tsā ba comprehends it as the pith instructions of the guru, who embodies Prajñāpāramitā.

<sup>7</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6a (p. 11). See also Ruegg (1988: 1248ff.); Brunnhölzl (2004: 52); Sherpa (2004: 172).

<sup>8</sup> The Eighth Karmapa claimed to have emphasised the *dohās* as transmitted via Vajrapāṇi in his teaching of the Great Seal (see Chapter Four (4.3), and *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b/p. 367). Though the Karmapa in the Madhyamaka commentary accepts this Madhyamaka type, he argues against the Alikakāra-Cittamātra (of Ratnākaraśānti) (Ruegg 1988: 1275). For the *dohās* as taught by Vajrapāṇi, see also Tatz (1994); their Tibetan transmissions are discussed in Karma 'phrin las pa's famed *Do ha skor gsum gyi ſika* (see Schaeffer 2000).

ordinary mind' (*tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad*) or 'directly realising the *dharmakāya*' (*chos sku mngon sum du byas*).

If one understands that a phenomenon (Tib. *chos can*, Skt. *dharmin*), such as a sprout, and conceptualisation (*nam rtog*) is not established apart from its thusness (Skt. *tathatā*), this is given the conventional expression (*tha snyad*) 'conceptualisation arises as *dharmakāya*'.<sup>9</sup> Here, the fundamental theme from the dialogues studied in Chapter Five is expounded in a more scholarly manner, reminding one that 'conceptualisation arises as *dharmakāya*' is a mere designation.

Being a key concept of Great Seal practice, doctrinal formulations about conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* surface in the question and answer texts of the Eighth Karmapa. The concise reply to a question by a certain Bla ma Khams pa<sup>10</sup> sets out to explain the view, 'that there exist in an unmixed manner two minds (*sems*) in the mental continuum (*rgyud*) of all beings.'<sup>11</sup> It presents the Eighth Karmapa's reception of the Third Karmapa's and 'Bri gung pa's doctrines.

Referring to the Third Karmapa's *Zab mo nang gi don*, Mi bskyod rdo rje relies on a teaching well known from the *Ratnagotravibhāga*<sup>12</sup>: the pure aspect, the Buddha nature inherent in beings, shows itself in the three phases: impure (for ordinary beings), pure and impure (for bodhisattvas), and completely pure (for Buddhas). How does the impure aspect of mind come about? The mind is in essence (*ngo bo*) empty, its nature (*rang bzhin*) clear, and its expression (*nam pa*) is unhindered—but this is not known by itself (*rang gis rang ma rig*). Therefore the mind at first (*sems dang po*) is

<sup>9</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6b (p. 12): 'di'i dbu ma'i lta ba brgyud la skyes pa na tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad ces pa dang/chos sku mngon sum du byas zer ba dang/chos can myu gu dang nam rtog sogs de dag de'i chos nyid las gzhan du ma grub par rtogs ba na nam rtog chos skur shar ba zhes tha snyad mdzad nas.

<sup>10</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, 3 fols. The text concerns what one may term the theory of the Great Seal. Lama Khams pa is specified in the colophon (fol. 3b/p. 223) to have been the lama of Bla ru, uncle and nephew. The place, where the Karmapa composed the text, was Zul phud. Little more could be found about the questioners in other reference works or the spiritual biographies of the Eighth Karmapa. This text found entry in the works of the Eighth Karmapa and can already be found both in the *dKar chag* of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa and the title lists of the Eighth Karmapa. A full translation and more extensive discussion can be found in Draszczuk and Higgins (2016).

<sup>11</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, fol. 1b (p. 220): *sems can thams kyi rgyud la sems gnyis ma 'dres par yod pa'i bstan bcos snying gi thur ma 'di brjod pa'i ched du phyag rgya chen po la phyag 'tshal lo*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ratnagotravibhāga*, I.51b; see also Burchardi (2000) and Ruegg (1989), for its reception in Tibet.

timeless awareness (*ye shes*), and at the same time obscured by ignorance, which is called 'consciousness' (*rnam shes*). Conventionally (*tha snyad du*), the former is an existing phenomenon, the natural, self arisen, inherent, undeluded Buddha nature.<sup>13</sup>

How then, if there are these two minds, can one maintain that conceptualisation is, in essence, the *dharmakāya*? It is not incompatible for one mind stream to have both the natural state (*gnyug ma*) and the superficial defilements (*glo bur gi dri ma*), as the defilements are no other substance than the natural state (*gnyug ma'i sems*), which is the *dharmakāya*, also identified with the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). The path consists of giving up fabrications (*bcos pa*) by assembling the conditions of training in the proper instructions and to rest in the natural state, thus realising that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are inseparable.<sup>14</sup> Despite a specific terminology, the pith instruction boils down to a point similar to the answer to Gling drung pa.

In the answer to Shel brags Bla ma Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, distinction is made between scholastic explications and more direct instructions.<sup>15</sup> Shel brags Bla ma had asked the Eighth Karmapa about the opinion that conceptualisation not being *dharmakāya* is in contradiction with the scriptures of sūtra and tantra. The Karmapa, quoting from both the Prajñāpāramitā-scriptures and the *Hevajratāntra* illustrates that the two not being different (*tha dad min*) does not mean being the same (*gcig*). He maintains: there would be no contradiction of cyclic existence and *nirvāṇa* being without difference in not being truly existent (*bden par ma grub par*). But they would be different in existing as unreal (*bden med du grub par*).<sup>16</sup> After a brief discussion employing various arguments and examples he concludes:

<sup>13</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, fol. 1b (p. 220).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. fol. 2a (p. 221).

<sup>15</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Shel dkar bla ma chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi dris lan*. This is apparently one of a number of replies to this Shel brags pa (who is in the page title of this work called Shel dkar Bla ma Chos kyi rgyal mtshan). The *dris lan* immediately preceeding in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* has his name as Bla ma Shel brag pa Nyi zla ras chen Chos kyi rgyal mtshan. According to the colophon, he belongs to the Karma bKa' brgyud pa followers in the g.Yar klung area (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma shel brag pa nyi zla ras chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi dris lan dgu pa*, fol. 5a/p. 266).

<sup>16</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Shel dkar bla ma chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi dris lan*, fol. 1b (p. 268): *rnam dag ye shes gzugs can dang/ 'khor ba rnam par rtog pa gnyis/ /khyad par cung zad yod ma yin/ 'khor ba spangs nas gzhan du ni/ mya ngan 'das pa rtogs mi 'gyurl*. These lines mix the last three *pāda* of *Hevajratāntra* I.x.32 (as edited by Snellgrove 1959) (*paścāt tattvaṃ samākhyātaṃ viśuddhaṃ jñānarūpiṇaṃ/ saṃsāravavyavadānena nāsti bhedo*

I also maintain conceptualisation as *dharmakāya*. However, the establishing of conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* which is in accordance with the scriptures you have placed [here], is a point commented on by the scholars (*mkhas pa dag*). Therefore, now meet with a learned lama and remove any doubts [about it] (*mtha' chod*).<sup>17</sup>

Tentatively interpreted, it means that the Karmapa is acting out the usual humble rhetoric of not considering himself learned, implying that he considers his approach—in the context of this answer—specifically meditation oriented.

In the *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag* (*Great Seal Esoteric Precept*), this key point is both briefly defined and combined with advice:<sup>18</sup> the cause of realising the *dharmakāya* is the ultimate *dharmadhātu* awareness (*ye shes*), undefiled by all stains of dualistic fixation, happiness, suffering, *saṃsāra*, and *nirvāṇa*. This unfabricated natural state is one's own mind, also termed timeless *dharmakāya*, ordinary mind, and inseparability of clarity and emptiness. Co-emergent with its nature it possesses the aspect of not seeing the *dharmakāya* clearly, taking hold of the undefiled nature. What blocks realisation are conceptualisations of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, permanence and nihilism, subject and object. This is 'not knowing' (Skt. *avidyā*).<sup>19</sup>

Now, not being affected (*bcos*) or stirred up through this very conceptualisation of subject and object, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, permanence and nihilism, [you] settle [the mind] in an unfabricated and non-artificial manner into the essence, which is the ordinary mind; freedom from all veils, concepts, and fabrications (*sgrib rtog spros pa*). Through that, the illusions of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* [which come about] through good and bad thoughts (*sems rtog*), the two veils, are liberated in their own place (*rang sar grol*). [This is] the

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*manāg api // Tib. phyi nas de nyid yang dag bshad/ nram dag ye shes gzugs can dang/ 'khor ba dang ni mya ngan 'das/ khyad par cung zad yod ma yin* and the last two of II.iv.32 (*evam eva tu saṃsāram nirvāṇam evam eva tu / saṃsārād r̥te nānyan nirvāṇam iti kathyate // Tib. 'di ni 'khor ba zhes bya ste/ 'di ni mya ngan 'das pa nyid/ 'khor ba spangs nas gzhan du ni/ mya ngan 'das pa rtogs mi 'gyur/*).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. fol. 2b (p. 268): *kho bo'ang nram rtog chos skur 'dod kyang khyod kyis bkod pa'i lung dang 'thad pa de dag gi nram rtog chos skur sgrub pa* [fol. 3a/ p. 269] *ni mkhas pa dag gis khrel ba'i gnas yin pas/ bla ma mkhas pa'i mdun du da dung legs par gtugs la mtha' chod par gyis shig ces karma pas smras pa'o.*

<sup>18</sup> The passage, called *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag*, is found in the collection *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma'i lam la dga' ba'i slob ma la gdams pa*, fol. 8a–9a (p. 579–581). The forty folio long collection consists of thirty-six short instructions (sometimes bearing a particular title). In the *dKar chag*, where the texts are listed separately, it is titled: *Phyag rgya chen po man ngag tu gdams pa* (*dKar chag*, fol. 6a/p. 10).

<sup>19</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma'i lam la dga' ba'i slob ma gdams pa*, fol. 8b (p. 580).

accumulation of ultimate awareness (*ye shes kyi tshogs*), and [that] causes one to obtain the result, the *dharmakāya*.<sup>20</sup>

Although explained in a more or less scholarly manner, comprehending conceptualisation as in essence *dharmakāya* could be identified as a central theme across different genres, certainly bearing similarity to sGam po pa's material.<sup>21</sup> The practitioner is warned that this advice in itself is a designation. In one answer, the scholastic approach to it is reserved for removing doubts and—rather than being an ontological end in itself—serves the purpose of instilling confidence for the meditation that settles the mind in an ineffable experience.

### 6.3 Common Strands and Divergent Interpretations

Having identified one key element, the Eighth Karmapa's distinctions of the Great Seal into tantric and non-tantric are now briefly reconsidered. In his Madhyamaka commentary, the Eighth Karmapa reasons that this meditational theory and practice (*lta sgom*) of the Great Seal is so significant because it is *the* effective antidote to subtle clinging and conceptualisation in meditation. It would be indeed important for removing latent tendencies of fabrication (*prapañcānuśaya*) and badness (*dauṣṭulya*), when the experience of the gnosis of bliss and emptiness in tantric meditation appears. As such, it is taught because it removes all veils like the 'single white sufficient remedy' (*dkar po gcig thub*).<sup>22</sup>

When practising the mantra system, there would be the danger that the symbolic and actual (*dpe don*) ultimate awareness (*jñāna*) of the third and fourth empowerments, would not be able to remove all veils. This reminds one of the points made about the *Kālacakratantra* in the *Answer to Gling drung pa*.<sup>23</sup> The story, employed as apologetic technique, bears similarities to this reply as well: the Karmapa uses the example of Phag mo gru pa, who, studying first with Sa skya Paṇḍita, made the energies enter the central channel and boasted of experiencing the innate joy (*sahajānanda*),

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: *da 'khor 'das rtag chad gzung 'dzin gyi rnam rtag de nyid kyiis ma bcos mi dkrug par tha mal shes pa sgrib rtog spros pa thams cad dang bral ba'i ngo bo la so ma ma bcos par bzhas pas/ sems rtog pa bzang ngan gyis/ 'khor 'das kyi 'phrul pa ste sgrib gnyis rang sar grol ba ni ye shes kyi tshogs te 'bras bu chos sku thob par byed.*

<sup>21</sup> Sherpa (2004: 188–293).

<sup>22</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6b (p. 12).

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Five (5.3.1–5.3.4). See also Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung*, fol. 45aff. (p. 555 ff.).

the path of seeing. This still incomplete experience of the fourth empowerment was, then, enhanced upon receiving pith instructions from sGam po pa.<sup>24</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa then notes with Sahajavajra's *Tattvadaśaka*-commentary (as summarised by 'Gos Lo tsā ba) that this path is 'essentially Pāramitā[naya], being in accordance with Mantra[naya] and being called Mahāmudrā'.<sup>25</sup> The experiential instructions of this system are also given without tantric empowerment. This Great Seal system would implicitly teach the ordinary and extraordinary Buddha nature of both sūtra and tantra, wherefore the *Ratnagotravibhāga* was emphasised by sGam po pa, Phag mo gru pa, and 'Bri gung 'Jig rten gsum dgon.<sup>26</sup>

'True nature Great Seal' (*gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po*), and the Great Seal of bliss and emptiness, were differentiated but equal in value. It would not be right to distinguish sūtra and tantra and consider the sūtra-approach superior:

Therefore, though according to the Mantra there does not exist a Great Seal instruction aside (*zur du*) from Nāropa's six doctrines, the lineage masters, having seen the empowerment of meaning (*don gyi dbang gzigs nas*), distinguished (*so sor mdzad*) instructions called 'six doctrines' and 'Great Seal'.<sup>27</sup>

This means he allows the possibility of teaching the Great Seal directly, without tantric empowerment, though he admits that the term stems from the tantras. The approach of sGam po pa as derived from Maitrīpa (here subsumed under practices focusing on sūtra-Madhyamaka) is then distinguished from the sūtra-based Great Seal from Atiśa. In an instruction on the

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. fol. 7a (p. 13). The story of Phag mo gru pa meeting sGam po pa is told also in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po sgros 'bum*, fol. 181a (p. 361). Furthermore, the Karmapa uses the *Phag mo gru pa'i zhus lan* (which is found in the *Dwags po bka' 'bum*) on the meeting of sGam po pa and Phag mo gru pa (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po sgros 'bum*, fol. 184b/p. 368).

<sup>25</sup> This 'quote' does not express the actual text but is a condensation of it by 'Gos Lo tsā ba from his *Ratnagotravibhāga*-commentary as shown by Mathes (2006: 202, n. 4); see also 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal, *Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma*. Nevertheless, the examination of the actual text by Mathes has proven that Sahajavajra indeed uses the term Great Seal for describing the pith instructions (ibid. and *Tattvadaśakaṭīka* 190a).

<sup>26</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 8a (p. 16).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.: *des na brgyud pa 'di pa dag sngags lugs ltar na chos drug las gzhan phyag chen gyi khrid zur du med kyang don gyi dbang 'di gzigs nas chos drug dang phyag chen zhes khrid so sor mdzad do*. Ruegg (1988: 1261, n. 52) has noted two textual variants: whereas the 1969 edition reads 'previous tradition' (*sngar lugs*), both the 1975 (and the 2004 *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* used here) have 'mantra tradition' (*sngags lugs*).

Great Seal of rGyal ba Yang dgon pa, the Eighth Karmapa explains that the common (*thun mong*) instruction from Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa* would be known as the 'innate union' (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) of dGe bshes sTon chen and sGe bshes dGon pa ba. He remarks, almost ironically, that sGam po pa and Phag mo gru pa had merely given such teachings the name 'Great Seal of innate union' for those disciples of the dark age who find pleasure in 'the highest', or 'high' (*mtsho mtsho*) vehicle.<sup>28</sup>

In the Madhyamaka commentary, the Karmapa also mentions the transmission of Atiśa, noting that it is the same in purport but rests more on wisdom based on conceptual analysis, whereas in Maitrīpa's system one finds out that the analysing knowledge itself is without root and base (*gzhi med rtsa bral*). As such, Atiśa's system contains the danger of deviating from emptiness (*shor sa*).<sup>29</sup>

The danger of deviating from emptiness recurs in various minor Great Seal commentaries; as does the connected argument that Great Seal is the effective antidote to clinging.<sup>30</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje quotes Mi la ras pa,

<sup>28</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGyal ba yang dgon pa'i ngo sprod bdun ma'i khrid yig*, fol. 1b (p. 560): *snigs ma'i gdul bya theg pa mtho mtho ma la dga' ba'i ngor*. Sherpa (2004: 174–176) has suggested on the basis of sGam po pa's writings to differentiate the Great Seal methods taught by sGam po pa: (i) 'metonymic' publicly taught 'Great Seal' *lhan cig skyes sbyor* teachings which 'designate a cause by naming its result' (ibid. 170) and mainly derive from the bKa' gdams pa. (ii) The actual Great Seal pith instructions transmitted by Maitrīpa (see ibid. 169–173). This seems to have parallels in the Indian material of Sahajavajra's *Tattvadaśakaṭikā*, which clearly distinguishes the 'practice of realising *mahāmudrā* on the basis of pith-instructions from both Pāramitā- and Mantrayāna' (Mathes 2006: 221).

<sup>29</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 9a f. (p. 17f.); see also Brunnhölzl (2004: 58) and Ruegg (1984: 1263). Again, a story is told: sGam po pa, having previously studied with the bKa' gdams pa masters, had risked still being fettered by this kind of meditation; only on meeting Mi la ras pa did he overcome these 'golden chains'. In a later passage, the Karmapa distinguishes the luminosity (*'od gsal*) as taught in the sūtras from the one in the tantras, which are—though having a common purport—distinguished by its means (*Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 30a ff./p. 56ff). The commentary continues to argue that Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* professes only the *rang stong* view. See Williams (1983a) and Brunnhölzl (2004: 553–597), for the Eighth Karmapa's difference to Tshong kha pa's Madhyamaka and the Eighth Karmapa's concern for Madhyamaka being an effective antidote to mental fixation (*prapañca*) and a means to liberation. For a translation of part of the sixth chapter, see Mikyö Dorje (2006).

<sup>30</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Glo bur gyi dri ma*, is concerned with explaining the correct understanding and cultivation of the ordinary mind. This text contains more interesting definitions (in part using terminology from both the *pramāṇa* and *phar phyin* treatises) and debates that cannot fully be presented here. It was requested by the scribe Bod pa rgya bo and was written by the Karmapa in Kong stod 'or shod. The text is found in the *dKar chag* (fol. 9a/p. 17) of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa but not in the title list of the Eighth

commenting on his advice to avoid the 'three delaying diversions' (*gol sa gsum*), relating to experiences from *śamatha* and the 'four occasions for straying' (*shor sa bzhi*) into a wrong understanding of *śūnyatā*, where he mentions the mantra methods.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, in the Eighth Karmapa's answer to a question about Great Seal by a Bla ma sNe ring pa, the Karmapa defines the Great Seal as tantric, perfectly in line with Sa skya Paṇḍita: the way of progressing through the stages and paths (*sa lam bgrod tshul*) would consist of untying the blocks in the subtle energy system of the right and left channel, melting them into the central channel, and thereupon traversing the five path and twelve *bhūmi*. The result would be actualised in being brought to maturity through the four empowerments, practising the two stages of tantric meditation, and applying the inner and outer Seals and three types of 'innate conduct' (*lhan cig spyod pa*).<sup>32</sup>

In temporary summary with regard to Chapter Five and also Chapter Six—though at this stage of research a final statement would be premature—the strands presented here allow the deduction of some striking characteristics and contradictions. The Karmapa continues blending the sūtra and tantra, like Maitrīpa, by emphasising the term *amanasikāra-madhyamaka*. In that context, he stressed the primary importance of the line, Saraha, Maitrīpa, sGam po pa, and the Third Karmapa. The Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal contains key elements found in the works of sGam po pa and the Indian siddhas: the removal of any clinging to experiences of empowerments or emptiness, and, connected to it, the teaching of conceptualisation as *dharmakāya*.

The Karmapa admits Great Seal practice which focuses on sūtra-Madhyamaka, as sGam po pa's emphasis. But he differentiates this Great Seal of sGam po pa from Atiśa's system which was called 'Great Seal' for pedagogical purpose. Though in his *Madhyamakāvatāra* commentary the Eighth Karmapa is at times opposed to considering sūtra Great Seal in any

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Karmapa in *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*. It could therefore have been composed after 1546.

<sup>31</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Glo bur gyi dri ma*, fol. 3a (p. 1077). For the *gol sa* and *shor sa*, see also Namgyal (1986: 293–313) and Jackson, D. (1994: 181–85), who translates Sa skya Paṇḍita's criticism in the *Thubs pa'i dgongs gsal* which maintains that precisely this teaching is not from the Buddha. As a strategy in the *Glo bur gyi dri ma*, Mi bskyod rdo rje refers Sa skya Paṇḍita's critique from the *sDom gsum rab dbye* (*blun po'i phyag rgya chen sgom pa phal cher dud 'gro'i gnas su skye*) to the wrong understanding of *śamatha*, which pertains to the *gol sa*.

<sup>32</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Ne ring 'phags pa'i dris lan*, fol. 1b (p. 322).



way superior to the tantric, in the reply to Gling drung pa (Chapter Five) the Karmapa taught the Great Seal as being neither sūtra nor tantra.

Moreover there seems to be an essential instruction, an 'essence Great Seal', to be applied, which is not clearly categorised but is the key for overcoming clinging and conceptualisation. One may see here some similarity to the Eighth Karmapa's contemporary, bKra shis rnam rgyal. bKra shis rnam rgyal, quoting the Indian siddha Saraha and sGam po pa, considers Great Seal an independent path which can nevertheless be linked to tantra. It would even be acceptable to connect it to the sūtras and tantras as benefit appears for many.<sup>33</sup> This interpretation, in accordance with the nineteenth century scholar bKra shis chos 'phel, highlights the pedagogical nature of the Great Seal systems.<sup>34</sup>

As the reply to Gling drung pa (like most of the instructions) was taught in a specific context, the textual evidence is still too thin to read the Karmapa's final view into it—if there is one. That its classification of the tantras into mundane and supramundane was found elsewhere, lends some credibility to this source's assertions. Its direction would also fit with the Karmapa's purported emphasis of the *dohā*, which figures also among one of the three basic distinctions outlined above. But in other works the Great Seal was defined as clearly and only tantric.

As one needs to remember that the adaption of teaching the Great Seal, in one way or another, largely depends on the guru-disciple interaction, one may refer to it as a perspective that allows for explaining such doctrinal variegations. The teacher or guru, under whose close guidance the Great Seal is to be taught, may in fact permeate most of the Great Seal approaches as both origin and means. It is therefore surprising that—apart from some early, rather unbalanced, classifications as 'Lamaism'—the soteriological significance of the teacher in the Great Seal traditions has been given comparatively little explicit attention in academic circles.<sup>35</sup> Yet, investigat-

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<sup>33</sup> Namgyal (1986: 110–112). This is found in the subsection on identifying the essence as path in the section which describes how the Great Seal embodies the deep meaning of both the sūtras and the tantras. The passage in the *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* is on fol. 8b (p. 16). (See also Ruegg 1988: 1261). Jackson, D. (1994: 25, n. 59, n. 60) reads it that Karmapa objected to considering tantric Great Seal in any way inferior. Yet, one may also read that he meant it to be not inferior to the sūtra Great Seal but to the essence Great Seal.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter Two (2.1.1, 2.1.2).

<sup>35</sup> An exception is Sobisch's 'Guru Devotion in the bKa' brgyud pa Tradition: Its Functioning as the Single Mean for the Arising of Realisation' (2011). The importance of the guru has been duly noted (see for example Jackson, R. 2004: 3–53, and notes below). But this thesis wishes to refer to the guru-devotion as a perspective for academic research on the Great Seal that allows for better explaining doctrinal variegations and raises questions about the

ing the guru's role is a research-focus next to the 'doctrinal route' that supports understanding the Great Seal as a pragmatic heuristic.

#### 6.4 *The Guru as Origin and Example in Vajrayāna and Great Seal Traditions*

The guru is a common element in further 'mystic traditions' ranging from Christianity to Sūfism and the Indian religions.<sup>36</sup> According to the Buddhist Tantras, the divine became immanent with the Vajrayāna, where the guru was seen as the actual embodiment of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The chosen personal teacher is the source of empowerment and instruction and cannot be compromised;<sup>37</sup> importance of the teacher can thus be considered a unifying element in the Tibetan Vajrayāna-traditions.<sup>38</sup>

The guru further takes *the* prominent role of introducing the student into the innate in the siddhas' songs, or the textual sources centring on *sahaja*<sup>39</sup>, which are cited as origins of non-tantric Great Seal.<sup>40</sup> The bKa' brgyud pa

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often missing logical argument behind the guru's importance. For Lamaism, see Lopez (1997).

<sup>36</sup> Moore (1978: 41); for the yogi in Indian traditions, see also the essays collected in Werner (1989); for mysticism in the discourses of the Buddha, see Harvey (1989). This section does not wish to discuss the intricacies of comparative mysticism but rather point to some striking themes in the Great Seal traditions. For understanding such aspects of religious experience, see, for example, Sharf (1996).

<sup>37</sup> See Snellgrove (1987: 176–180) who quotes *Guhyasamājatantra*, for the teacher in the Buddhist tantras; Brook (1990: 71) considers the guru as one of several elements typical for Tantrism, as does Padoux (2000: 42–45). For definitions of Tantra, see Padoux (2002) and White (2000, 2005). See also the 'Celebration of the Guru' as common elements of the siddhas' songs in the introduction of Jackson, R. (2004: 3–53).

<sup>38</sup> For the bKa' brgyud traditions, see, for example, the famed short invocation of Vajradhara: 'Devotion is said to be the head of meditation. A meditator constantly calls upon his lama as he is the one who opens the door to the treasury of profound instructions. Grant me your blessing so that non-artificial devotion may be born [within me]!' (dBang phyug rdo rje Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i phreng ba*, p. 117: *mos gus sgom gyi ngo bor gsungs pa bzhin/ /man ngag gter sgo 'byed pa'i bla ma la/ /rgyun du gsol ba 'debs pa'i sgom chen la/ /bcos min mos gus skye bar byin gyis rlobs/*).

<sup>39</sup> See also Kvaerne 1977: 61–64, for a brief discussion of the term *sahaja*.

<sup>40</sup> Abhayadattaśrī, *Grub chen brgyad cu*, 172 (song of Tantipa), translated by Kapstein (2006a: 55). See also Tillipā's *Dohākoṣa* 6 (Jackson, R. 2004; see also ed. and trans. Bhayani 1998: 14). Saraha's songs portray the guru as someone who 'has done with karma' (*las zin pa yi skyes bu*) and at whose feet one should gain certainty about the nature of one's own mind: *Dohākoṣa* 43a (Jackson, R. 2004): *kye lags dbang po ltos shig dang / 'di las ngas ni ma gtogs (Advayavajra reads: mi rtogs) so / las zin pa yi skyes bu yi/ drung du sems thag gcad par byos* (see also Scherer 2007). See also Jackson, R. (2004: 3–53).

Great Seal preliminaries usually contain a meditation on the teacher, which is, at times, considered the actual practice.<sup>41</sup> sGam po pa has stated:

It (Buddhahood) is acquired through the blessing of the guru, from one's own reverence and devotion, and by the power of meditatively cultivating through diligent effort, whereas otherwise it will not be acquired.<sup>42</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa is no exception in suggesting the teacher's significance. He, for example, explains that there is no more supreme 'reincarnate [lama]' (*sprul sku*) than the vajra-master, who transmits the liberating and ripening (*smin grol*) empowerments and instructions. The meditation of those who do not truly discern the practice (*gdar sha gcod*) with the help of a supreme teacher, but instead practise not liberating their mind but pretending (*ltar 'chos*) greatness in the Great Seal, is likened to 'ascetic practice of pigs and dogs'.<sup>43</sup> The bad teacher is as dangerous to spiritual development as the authentic one is beneficial; pretence of spiritual development is regarded as a main transgression.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the Karmapa notes that false teachers abound<sup>45</sup> and complains about lamas these days, 'who give up a bit of drinking and start talking about accomplishment'.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The Ninth Karmapa argues: '[The meditation on the teacher] is referred to as a "preliminary", however, it determines whether meditation takes place or not, since it is actually the main practice' (dBang phyug rdo rje, *Phyag chen nges don rgya mtsho*, fol. 48b: *de ni sngon 'gro ming btags kyang dngos gzhi rang yin pas sgom skye mi skye 'di la rag las so*.) For the various Great Seal preliminaries see dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i 'phreng ba*; Namgyal (1986: 132–138); bKra shis nram rgyal, *sNgon 'gro khrid yig thun bzhi'i nral 'byor du bya ba*. See also the seventeenth-century work Ngag dbang bsTan pa'i nyi ma, *Phyag chen khrid yig* and the modern 'Bri gung Lam mkhyen rgyal po Rin po che, *Phyag rgya chen po lnga ldan gyi sngon 'gro'i khrid*. In the fivefold Great Seal of the 'Bri gung pa, the teacher is also one of the five elements of practice (Sobisch 2003a). For the importance of the teacher in sGam po pa's Great Seal, see Sherpa (2004: 93), Jackson, D. (1994: 150), and Kragh (1998: 12–26); see also Namgyal (1986: 112).

<sup>42</sup> sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen, *rJe phag mo gru pa'i zhu las* (translation and Tibetan text in Jackson, D. 1994: 150–151).

<sup>43</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, fol. 6a (p. 745).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. The text paints drastic consequences for those pretenders, who are prone to find themselves in the hellish states of existence (*naraka*).

<sup>45</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar*, fol. 17b (p. 148). It was noted before, that the slightly tense political climate coincided with lamentations of spiritual degeneration, a theme which was also popular in the much later nineteenth century vivid descriptions of Dza dPal sprul (Patrul Rinpoche 1994: 102–103; *sNying thig sngon 'gro'i khrid yig*). 'Blind faith' is thus not recommended, nor receiving the four empowerments, nor meditating on the teacher without having examined him. See also Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Po to ba'i chig lab ring mo la mi bskyod rdo rje 'grel pa*

Why is the guru so important? The Great Seal would be a transmission of the meaning (*don brgyud*), and the one communicating its understanding should be called 'the main lama' (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*).<sup>47</sup> Chapter Four outlined the Eighth Karmapa's study and practice of the Great Seal: the transmission of blessing from his single most important teacher, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.<sup>48</sup> The stories quoted so often, be it about Phag mo gru pa and sGam po pa, Khams pa sbad mchod and Phag mo gru pa, or Mi la ras pa and sGam po pa, in essence revolve around the students and their relationship to a teacher.

The instructions analysed in Chapter Five were either written by the Karmapa or (supposedly) a recorded word. In the dialogues, the great devotion the Karmapa inspired helped the students get closer to the highest insight. Thus, tradition views as origin of Great Seal instructions in both oral and written form the guru, who is legitimised by his transmission.<sup>49</sup> The Karmapa writes in a spiritual memoir that the teacher does not place the liberation in one's hand, but that one should see his qualities and practice like him.<sup>50</sup> In other words, the teacher is origin as well as example.

Philosophical argument for the teacher is rare in the examined material, so natural does appear the primary role.<sup>51</sup> The implicit argument is rather one of transmission and experience; by invoking the authenticity of the lineage (*brgyud pa*), its power or blessing (Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*), and the realisation of the guru.<sup>52</sup>

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*mdzad pa'i bstan bcos*, fol. 73b (p. 70), where the Eighth Karmapa comments on a work by the bKa' gdams pa master Po to ba. The relationship and the question of who is a teacher and who is not is also explained in an instruction the Eighth Karmapa passed on to his fervent sponsors of the sKu rab pa family (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *sKu rab pa'i sde pa khu dbon la bstsal ba'i khrid kyi rim pa*, fol. 8a ff./ pp. 209ff.).

<sup>46</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 1b (p. 958). According to the colophon, this text consists of a note made by some students of the Eighth Karmapa, which they then showed to him for confirmation (ibid. fol. 20b/p. 996).

<sup>47</sup> The Eighth Karmapa defines quoting 'Gos Lo tsā ba in *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 8a (p. 16).

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter Four (4.1.4). What is more, the first recorded teaching of the Karmapa was the meditation instruction (*zab khrid*) on the guru yoga, imparted in 1513 in Ri bo che (*A khu A khra*, fol. 34b/p. 100).

<sup>49</sup> For example, in a dream vision of Marpa, where he describes meeting the siddha Saraha (Kapstein 2006a: 51–52). The poem is studied in Kapstein (2003: 767–773).

<sup>50</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 17b, p. 148.

<sup>51</sup> Roger Jackson has brought up this issue in a keynote speech on Great Seal studies at the *Mahāmudrā* Panel of the Eleventh Conference of the IATS, Bonn, August 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Kragh (2011) has pointed out with the example of the six doctrines of Nāropa, how specific texts were only transmitted due to their authority but not necessarily due to their being used

## 6.5 The Guru as Means in the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal Instructions

This section turns to the teacher's role not only as origin or example but as means and goal of realisation in the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal instructions that do not explicitly entail the tantric path of means.<sup>53</sup>

*Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid* (Meditation Instruction for the Kaṃ tshang Great Seal Practice) explains the different paths for the different capacities, remarking that if a student endowed with 'fortunate residues' (*skal ldan*) meets a guru of the Dwags po tradition, not much elaboration is needed. On the basis of the deep wish to let go of attachment to cyclical existence (*nges 'byung*) and harmful actions, 'opening up' or 'invoking' (*gsol 'debs*) is considered essential, since the realisation of all paths only emerges from the three jewels and the lama. Through fierce invocation (*gsol ba phur tshugs su btab pa*), one could not avoid accomplishing *śamatha*, *vipaśyanā*, and the timeless awareness (*ye shes*) of the Great Seal.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, the idea of invocation, or opening up, is both vital entrance to practice and a form of training. The Karmapa then defines *gsol 'debs*: apart from eating, drinking, and sleeping, the practitioner's body (through attending the lama), speech (through pronouncing the qualities of

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in practice. Davidson has argued that, in Tibet, the translator and his (sometimes self-styled) instructions (*gdams ngag*) constitute an important point of Tibetan tantric lineages, as do the clans for its transmission (Davidson 2004: 149–151).

<sup>53</sup> An important stanza for guru-devotion among the bKa' brgyud pa traditions is *Hevajratāntra* I.viii.36 (especially the third line): 'That which is not expressed by others, the inborn; which cannot be found anywhere; is to be known through ...[a special kind of]... guru attendance; and through one's own merit' (translation by Sobisch 2011, who treats in detail the variant problematic readings and 'Jig rten dgon po's interpretation of *dus mtha'* (Skt. *parva*) as the final moment of attending the guru as *dharma-kāya*). See also David Jackson's translation of the same verse and its context in sGam po pa's *rJe Phag mo gru pa's zhu lan* (Jackson, D. 1994: 150–152).

<sup>54</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 3b (p. 962). It is difficult to accurately translate the meaning of *gsol 'debs*. When it is used with an object following in the later part of the sentence, it can convey something like 'please' or 'I ask of you' ('please grant me innate gnosis/timeless awareness of the innate': *gsol ba 'debs so lhan skyes ye shes stsol*). Where it is used without an object following, 'to invoke' or 'open up' can convey the state to be achieved in phrases such as 'all beings open up to the precious lama': *sems can thams cad bla ma rin po che la gsol ba 'debs* (both examples from the guru-yoga in dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i 'phreng ba*, p. 117). 'To pray' would be an alternative, but 'prayer' often carries implicit assumptions regarding the nature of religion (Gomez 2000: 1037). For the so-called 'Christian phase' in translating Buddhism, see Doboom (2001: 2f.).

the lama), and mind (contemplating only the manifold qualities), should be constantly focused on the teacher as opposed to invoking the teacher at set times and occasions only.<sup>55</sup> In an interlinear remark (*mchan*) a formal *guru-yoga* is outlined.<sup>56</sup>

The text continues with a description of the main body of practice (*dn̄gos bzhi*), which consists of the practices of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* meditation.<sup>57</sup> Again, the particular method of calm abiding and insight meditation of the Dwags po tradition is connected to contemplating one's teacher; after an outline of calm abiding practice, the Karmapa continues: 'in the tradition of the system of the bKa' brgyud doctor from Dwags po, which expounds all words [of the Buddha] (*bka'*) as an instructional precept (*gdams ngag*)<sup>58</sup>, one would sit in the seven-fold meditational posture, evoke the teacher as the Buddha Vajradhara, and fervently open up to him (*gsol 'debs*). *gsol 'debs* incites the state of devotion or openness (*mos gus*), which in turn acts as a means to let the mind rest one-pointedly on the wholesome (*dge ba*): a facilitator to calm the mind and experience the three qualities connected with it: clarity (*gsal ba*), joy (*bde ba*), and non-conceptuality (*rnam rtog med pa*).<sup>59</sup>

The teacher re-surfaces in the ensuing discussion on different objections to the bKa' brgyud method, where the Karmapa emphasises that in this tradition one should not over-analyse conventionally.<sup>60</sup> Instead, one should rest the mind in a way that is suitable for the Great Seal ultimate awareness to arise. How? By invoking (*gsol 'debs*) an authentic teacher, who is the essence of all Buddhas, and having his blessing affecting or entering

<sup>55</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 3b (p. 962).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. One visualises the Buddha Vajradhara, being one with the First Karmapa and the root lama, e.g. the Eighth Karmapa. After a seven branch training (*yan lag bdun*), the guru dissolves in to a Great Seal *bindu* and then melts with oneself.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. fol. 4b (p. 964).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. fol. 5a (p. 965): *bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje'i lugs kyis bka' thams cad gdams ngag tu 'chad pa'i* [fol. 5b/p. 966] *srol la/*.

<sup>59</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 5a (p. 965). The work discusses these states and how they are connected to the sixth consciousness (*drug pa yid kyi rnam par shes pa*) in more detail. As this section analyses the roles of the teacher, the subtleties of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* meditation are not discussed here in detail. A similar outline is found at a later stage of the work (ibid. fol. 8b/p. 972).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. fol. 6b (p. 968). An interlinear comment strikes one as similar to the *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, where the Karmapa is generally opposed to the reification of further *prapañca* through building a philosophical edifice (Brunnhölzl 2004: 555; Williams 1983a: 125).

(*bzhugs*) one's mind.<sup>61</sup> He then relates it to sGam po pa's three paths: (i) the one of analysis (*dpvod pa*), (ii) the one of direct cognition (*dnogon sum*), and (iii) the one of blessing (*byin rlabs*). Here the path of blessing is not equated with the Vajrayāna (as it is at times done in sGam po pa's writings), but with 'the tradition of this transmission' (*brgyud pa 'di'i lugs*).<sup>62</sup>

The work continues to explain both calm *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* meditation across ten folios; the details of which cannot be expounded here.<sup>63</sup> Again, the lama is employed as a means, while cultivating *samadhi* or profound absorption and the three ensuing qualities of joy (*bde ba*), clarity (*gsal ba*), and non-conceptuality (*mi rtog pa*); making the face (*zhal*) of the lama an object of mind is considered a skilful means for one-pointedness (*rtse gcig*) in this bKa' brgyud lineage.<sup>64</sup>

*Vipaśyanā* is at first introduced with the depictions of essencelessness (Tib. *bdag med*, Skt. *anātman*). After some discussions, the Karmapa argues for a particular way of insight meditation, which is summarised as '... [one] needs to settle the immediate mind (*de ma thag yid*) on all aspects of the mental formation (Skt. *saṃskāra*, Tib. *'du byed*) of the eight groups of consciousness.'<sup>65</sup> In other words, 'immediate', meaning also 'moment' and 'settle', is defined as 'apprehending' (*'dzin pa*), an approach attributed to sGam po pa and the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 6b (p. 968).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. This is certainly a very interesting point, which supports Sobisch's research on 'Jig rten don po's understanding of guru devotion as the single means to enlightenment (Sobisch 2011). The interlinear comment of the Eighth Karmapa here reserves this path to the individual with fortunate propensities (*skal ldan*) who, upon having the nature of mind directly pointed out (by a teacher), realises enlightenment. This would be the famed 'sudden' (*cig car*) approach (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 6b/p. 968). For sGam po pa's three paths, see Chapter Two (2.1.2); see also Sherpa (2004: 129–36), Kragh (1998: 29–39), and Mathes (2006: 2).

<sup>63</sup> The discussions of insight meditation, presented in this brief but informative source, are themselves of considerable interest for the doctrinal aspects of Great Seal teaching. What concerns this section here, however, is the role of the teacher.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. fol. 8b (p. 972). Making 'blind faith' (*rmongs dad*) its cause, however, is not considered correct (*mchog*).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. fol. 17a (p. 988).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. The interlinear comment specifies this as the intention of the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, as the defining characteristic (*rang gi mtshan nyid*) of whatever consciousness (*shes pa*) is apprehended. The text asserts the indispensability for understanding this subtle point because, on the basis of it, the ignorance about the ultimate awareness of the Great Seal is removed. After more descriptions of how the levels (*bhūmi*) of the bodhisattvas are realised, this approach is once more ascribed to sGam po pa and the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (ibid. fol. 20a/p. 995). The wording may likely refer to

The function of devotion (*mos gus*) in this work is an intense state of mind which is both a prerequisite of, and also a part of, the actual practice.<sup>67</sup> Connected or enhanced by the practice of *gsol 'debs*, it can be used to both concentrate the mind as well as to bring it to a state where conceptual states fade and the power (*byin rlabs*) enters the mind stream of the trainee. That does not exclude investigating mind, which the instructions also professes to a great degree, but points to devotion's crucial function next to understanding or insight *prajñā*.<sup>68</sup>

Other instructions indicate a similar usage for 'confidence' (Tib. *dad pa*, Skt. *śraddhā*). The first of seven sessions in the *Phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i zin bris* (*Note of the Prerequisites for Cultivating the Great Seal*)<sup>69</sup> advises:

Above one's head, on a lotus and moon[-disc], [one visualises] the Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje, having a black crown in a garuḍa wing [form] and with golden radiance, endowed with the three dharma robes. Then one does one-pointed prayer through the [praise entitled] *sKu bstod zla med ma*.<sup>70</sup>

Session two defines the 'three kinds of confidence' (*dad pa gsum*) as centring on the teacher, deviating from the more standard description in sGam po pa's *Thar rgyan*.<sup>71</sup>

Rang byung rdo rje's *rNam shes ye shes 'byed pa'i bstan bcos* (see also the paraphrase by Sheehey 2005). The work concludes with an invocation of the transmission lineage of the Great Seal lamas from Vajradhara via Saraha to Sangs rgyas mnyan pa and the Eighth Karmapa. Thereby, it places the instructions in the continuity of the precepts passed from teacher to student (ibid. fol. 20b/p. 996).

<sup>67</sup> Other instructions directly make *mos gus* the central theme: Apart from the *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, there are titles clearly indicating *mos gus* as the main factor. For example the *Mos gus phyag chen gyi khrid zab mo rgyal ba rgod tshang pa'i lugs*, the *Mos gus bdun ma'i khrid yig gzhung 'grel ba dang bcas pa* (esp. fol. 31 a/p. 795), and the *Mos gus chen mo'i khrid* (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 364) which remains unidentified (all authored by the Eighth Karmapa).

<sup>68</sup> Analysis of the absence of self is carried out in for example Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 11a–13a/pp. 977–981).

<sup>69</sup> This text again consists of a note (*zin bris*) of the Eighth Karmapa's teaching made by his student Bya bral Ratnanātha, who then later showed it to the Karmapa for confirmation (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i zin bris*, fol. 3b/p. 275).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. fol. 1b (p. 272): */de'ang phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i dmigs thun dang po ni/ rang gi spyi bor pad zla'i steng du rgyal ba karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje zhwa nag khyung gshog gser mdangs can chos gos nmam pa gsum ldan du gsal btob nas sku bstod zla med ma'i sgo nas gsol 'debs rtse gcig tu byed pa'ol*.

<sup>71</sup> For a slightly diverging definition popular in the bKa' brgyud lineage, see sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen, *Dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*, pp. 214–219. D. Jackson has observed that also graded teaching works of sGam po pa and Phag mo gru pa



2. Then, increasing the longing towards that very [lama] (*de nyid*), one mainly strives to accomplish the very trust of wishing; [and] while [doing so], the trust of conviction, [namely] to consider whatever [the lama] says true and valid,<sup>72</sup> comes about. And then, as the trust arises, where the two obscurations of one's mind become removed, one settles on that (*de*) one-pointedly.<sup>73</sup>

Here, confidence culminates in a state free from obscurations. This suggests that *dad pa* is not only prerequisite but also actual meditation, though the object in Great Seal practice is the guru rather than the teachings or the Buddha in more general terms.<sup>74</sup>

Additionally, it is vital to mention the practices or instructions, which are either explicitly designed as a meditation on the teacher (*guru-yoga*) or come very close to such practices, indicated by their content. One of the Eighth Karmapa's instructions exemplifies a guidebook for meditation that passes on essential instructions for advancing one's contemplation.<sup>75</sup>

start out with the notion of confidence or trust (*dad pa*) as prerequisite, as do the 'three [levels] of appearance' (*snang ba gsum*) meditation manuals of the Sa skya pa (Jackson, D. 1994: 233; 242, n. 24).

<sup>72</sup> One may add a second '*dzin pa* for *tshad ma* here, or interpret the passage in a different way: from the *bden* '*dzin* comes the understanding of *tshad ma*, 'considering whatever [the lama] says as true, [he is] authentic/valid.'

<sup>73</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i zin bris*, fol. 1b (p. 272): 2 /*de nas de nyid la 'dun pa cher btang ste 'dod pa'i dad pa nyid gtso bor sgrub pa la yid ches pa'i dad pa ci gsungs la bden 'dzin tshad ma skyes shing/ de nas rang rgyud kyi sgrib gnyis dwangs* [fol. 2a/p. 273] *pa'i dad pa 'byung bas de la rtse gcig tu 'jog pa'ol*.

<sup>74</sup> In different Buddhist traditions, confidence (Skt. *śraddhā*, Pāli: *saddhā*) sometimes translated 'faith', has a range of meanings and is not to be confused with the theological concept of belief. The idea of confidence as practice is not confined to the Great Seal traditions, though the main focus is not usually the guru in other contexts. Brassard (2000: 98–99) has argued that in Mahāyāna context of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, beyond mere preliminary value, *śraddhā* can be considered a practice itself. It is sometimes glossed as 'trust or reliance on someone else' (*parapratyaya*), further connotations are often subsumed under *prasāda* or the *prasannacitta*, which evokes the meaning of calm and serenity as well as conviction and trust (Gomez 2004: 278). In the sūtras, it is found among the 'five faculties' (*indriya* or *bala*) conducive to good practice or, in more scholastic works, among the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment (ibid.; Gimello 2004: 51). These are positive states of mind (*kuśala*), which often have the connotation of active engagement in practice, overcoming sluggishness and doubt (also expressed with the word *adhimukti* or *adhimokṣa*), and gaining the ability to trust or rely upon something (*Abhidharmakośa* VI. 29).

<sup>75</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *mNyams med dags* [sic!] *po bka' brgyud kyi gdam* [sic!] *pa'i srogi* [abbrv. for *srog gi*] *yang snying*, NGMPP, Reel no. E 12794/6, 9 fols, manuscript, *dbu med*, partly written in '*khyug yig* (*Heart Essence of the Life Force of the Instructions of the Uncomparable Dwags po bKa' brgyud*). It found entry into the Eighth Karmapa's title list from 1546 (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 8a/p. 365), and the colophon clearly indicates the Eighth Karmapa's authorship.

It contains condensed, and at times cryptic, advice for seven meditation sessions; ranging from *guru-yoga* and control of inner energies, to contemplations of loving-kindness and compassion.<sup>76</sup> But this 'heart-essence of instructions' clearly puts all practices into the framework of 'becoming' the teacher (presumably in its ultimate and metaphorical sense). It starts with the words: 'further, those wishing to accomplish me myself',<sup>77</sup> and closes with: 'Those who wish to realise the state of me, Mi bskyod rdo rje, in one life and one body, should strive to accomplish what was taught [here] in this way.'<sup>78</sup>

Emulating the teacher is thus the fundamental goal of the path; and in that, the work is similar to the Eighth Karmapa's famed *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal 'byor*, which starts with: 'Now, those, who think only of me, Mi bskyod rdo rje ...'.<sup>79</sup> This typical blend of oral and written transmission extends to the point where the text comes to life in meditation and could be termed 'the teacher as text'. Another *guru-yoga* instruction concludes with the remark that unless *mos gus* is stable, methods to increase trust (*dad pa*) towards the teacher should be applied.<sup>80</sup> This suggests *mos gus* also functions as goal.

On the whole, the concept of *dad pa*, or confidence towards the teacher, and the ensuing practices of *mos gus* and *gsol 'debs*, are a central pillar of Great Seal as prerequisite, practice, and goal. One may even go so far as to say that devotion to the teacher is the means for realising the Great Seal next to insight. With this emphasis, these particular instances of bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal texts could be termed Vajrayāna, insofar as Vajrayāna has the guru and his transmission as a defining characteristic and insofar the guru is used as means: whether the yogic exercises of the path of means are

<sup>76</sup> Informants from the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition have maintained that this work was designed for advanced practitioners, who had received guidance previously. They would know what certain cryptic lines would mean when doing their meditative practice (oral communication, Ma ni ba Shes rab rgyal mtshan Rin po che, July 2007; oral communication mKhan po Nges don, December 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *mNyams med dags po bka' brgyud*, fol. 1b: *de yang khoo (= kho bo) rang sgrub par 'dod pa rnams/*.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. fol. 9a: *zhes bya ba 'di ni kho bo mi bskyod rdo rje'i go 'phang tshe cig lus cig gi grub par 'dod pa rnams kyi (emend to kyi?) 'di bzhin sgrub par mdzod cig/*.

<sup>79</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal sbyor*, p. 269: *da ni kho bo mi bskyod rdo rje kho na min pa bsam rgyu med pa kun*.

<sup>80</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma phyi nang gsang gsum kyi sgrub thabs mos gus gsol 'debs*, fol. 18b (p. 810).

employed or not.<sup>81</sup> This indicates a certain flexibility, suggesting that the doctrine taught rather depends on circumstances.

This chapter has portrayed a threefold basic differentiation of the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal and pictured the conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* instructions as a key doctrine. Further investigating Great Seal categorisations in the instructions of the Eighth Karmapa, it has highlighted some distinct features: how the Karmapa differentiates between sGam po pa's innate union instructions and those passed on from Atiśa and how he uses stories and the rhetoric of removal of clinging for justification. Some question and answer texts define Great Seal as only tantric, some as beyond sūtra and tantra, whereas the Madhyamaka commentary maintains they should not be distinguished in purport.

Apart from the common strands, these contradictions suggest that at this stage of research it is hard to pin down the 'final' interpretation or hierarchy of the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal. As it seems intrinsic to the study of Great Seal texts that it often evades classification, one must ask oneself, whether such a research avenue does full justice to the material. Certainly, attempting to understand and trace doctrinal developments, terms, and their various meanings and contexts, its terminology, doctrinal development, and systematisation is a necessary and important undertaking.<sup>82</sup>

But the doctrinal variegations support the Great Seal's pedagogical significance, in which genre and addressee play more than a secondary role. Viewing these different approaches as pedagogical helps to make sense of these apparent contradictions. As does an investigation of the guru's significance as origin and example. Guru devotion in the Great Seal instructions of the Eighth Karmapa was then shown to be both prerequisite and practice of the Great Seal in not specifically tantric instructions.

In conjunction with the doctrinal flexibility outlined, this supports the suggestion that the Great Seal is not a set of readymade doctrines and practices but rather consists of, and lives in, the dynamic interaction bet-

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<sup>81</sup> Sobisch (2011) has reached similar conclusions by investigating sGam po pa's and 'Jig rten dgon po's works. He has argued that the guru devotion is the single means for the arising of realisation, especially in the final phase, where the guru is understood to be the *dharmakāya*. In the *guru-yoga* the realisation would—though not depending on the path of means—still be understood as tantra.

<sup>82</sup> Jackson, D. (1990b: 59–63) has suggested that researchers trace each doctrine in the context of the Great Seal debates around Sa skya Paṇḍita and the bKa' brgyud pa. As was shown, doctrinal classification and apologetics were carried out extensively in the writings of, among others, the Eighth Karmapa, bKra shis rnam rgyal, and 'Brug chen Padma dkar po.

ween teacher and student. The teacher is—true to the Buddhist ideal of the ‘best preacher’—depicted as the one who selects the appropriate method from the ‘ocean of instructions’.<sup>83</sup> The main goal is then to actualise the innate, to find conceptualisation as in essence *dharmakāya*, and come to an experience. Experience and realisation are the ultimate goals that constitute the measure for any method.<sup>84</sup> This pragmatic approach bears similarities to traits of early Buddhism, as pointed out in the famous *Alagaddūpamasutta*.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> For the Buddha as the best preacher, see Deegalle (2006: 21–35).

<sup>84</sup> Realisation is achieved through training in meditative experiences (*mnyam*) and finally resting in the natural state (Martin 1992: 242). Sharf (1995) has—mainly on the basis of Japanese Buddhism—argued that the rhetoric of experience is not based on exact terms and experiences. Gyatso warns not to take this to the extreme (1999: 115f.) and shows that, unlike Japanese Buddhism, Tibetan traditions clearly have written about experience (*nyams myong*). She refers to the Great Seal, Direct Vision branch of the Great Perfection, and the four empowerments of the *niruttara*-tantras.

<sup>85</sup> It compares the Buddha's teaching to a raft: ‘You, O monks, who understand the Teaching's similitude to a raft, you should let go even (good) teachings, how much more false ones!’ *Alagaddūpamasutta* 14 (*Majjhima Nikāya* 22), trans. Ñyānāponika Thera (1974) (see also Scherer 2006b).



## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to explore the Eighth Karmapa's life and writings, analysing how he taught the Great Seal in specific contexts and textual genres.

Through critical evaluation of the content and origins of Tibetan sources contained in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, a solid foundation was laid for this thesis and future research. Specifically, material drawn from three early spiritual biographies was carefully investigated to construct a more complete portrait and analysis of the Eighth Karmapa's life and remedy the shortage of historical research of his period. The Eighth Karmapa can be considered the most significant scholar of the Karmapa lineage besides the Third Karmapa. Yet, crucial to his life were the mystical practices of the Great Seal, the transmission of blessing from Sangs rgyas mnyan pa, apparently taught even without much formal education. The Karmapa has been shown as a talented, at times struggling youth, who exhibited certain humbleness.

Despite, or one might say because of, involvement in Tibetan politics from a young age, inherited from his predecessor, his (and his spiritual biographer's) attitude towards the religio-political climate of the time was not enthusiastic. Appeasement efforts are reported alongside skilfully written letters to rulers and open laments of the degenerate times and lamas. The first half of the sixteenth century emerged as a crucial period. The dBus and gTsang wars, and the dGe lugs and bKa' brgyud political clashes have been related to the founding of two key monasteries near Lhasa. These geo-strategic underpinnings propelled spiritual transmissions into becoming sects, entangled in political affairs. Despite the dGe lugs and bKa' brgyud political tensions and the direct manner of the Karmapa's philosophical argumentations, his broad education, interests, and the events surrounding the composition of his *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and *Madhyamakāvatāra* commentaries suggest caution when reading political agendas into scholastic commentaries, even those of a powerful hierarchy. Nor should one seek to presume exclusively doctrinal reasons for ongoing sectarian tensions.

In future, continued historical studies of the Eighth Karmapa's life are recommended, taking into account the spiritual biographies of his contemporaries and students, particularly 'Brug chen Padma dkar po, bKra shis rnam rgyal, the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, and dPa' bo gstug la 'phreng ba. Investigation into his relationship with Pad ma dkar po is particularly required, and letters to the Rin spungs pa rulers and local lords also await detailed academic attention. The ground for such undertakings has been prepared here, and any approach should be aware of the intricacies of the spiritual biography genre. The Karmapa's Madhyamaka interpretations, and expositions on the Buddhist tantras, too, will engage researchers for years to come.

Regarding the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal itself, this book could only open the area of research and come to some preliminary conclusions on the basis of some case studies: As may be expected, Mi bskyod rdo rje's teachings are interspersed with reactions to Sa skya Paṇḍita, including polemics, argumentations, and stories. Like his contemporary bKa' brgyud pa masters, he was 'haunted by the ghost of Sa skya Paṇḍita'.<sup>1</sup> Yet one of his central contributions to his tradition's Great Seal lay in—similar to that of Mi pham rNam rgyal for the nineteenth-century rNying ma pa—clarifying Great Seal theory and practice through exposition and debate of the main scholastic topics and continued emphasis on Atiśa's graded path.<sup>2</sup> By giving the Karma bKa' brgyud pa more grounding in the Tibetan canon, he had tried to secure and spread the practice cherished by his school.

But, in spite of this apparently conservative stance, the Karmapa's Great Seal instructions, advices, and answers to questions reveal the radical rhetoric of immediacy typical of Great Seal traditions: the echo of Saraha, the Great Brahmin, and his *dohā* (as transmitted by Vajrapāṇi), the emphasis on Maitrīpa and the central position of sGam po pa.

Three facets have become evident in the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal interpretations. Firstly, there is a much-needed instruction for understanding conceptualisation's true nature as Buddhahood and overcoming subtle clinging. Secondly, this instruction is taught differently: as directly letting go of artifice, on the basis of sūtra-related practices, or with the aid of the tantric path of means; different approaches are praised as superior in different texts. Finally, the common origin of these instructions is the guru. The

<sup>1</sup> This metaphor was first used by Roger Jackson on his keynote address at the *Mahāmudrā*-panel of the IATS conference, Bonn, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> For Mi pham rNam rgyal's contributions, see, for example, Smith (2001: 227–235) and Phuntsho (2005).

guru is used in meditation practices as an aid, devotion to the guru in combination with understanding conceptualisation is a soteriological sufficient factor, and realisation of the guru's ultimate state represents the goal—whether employing the yogic exercises of the path of means or not.

Whereas the first point is apparent across both commentaries and instructions, the second becomes evident through studying the different ways in which he guides students in specific instruction related genres. In how the Eighth Karmapa explained the Great Seal to Gling drung pa, the sensitive religio-political context has become evident, along with pedagogical skill. While the importance of the guru, the third point, has been duly noted in previous academic studies, this thesis wishes to take those studies further, interpreting guru-devotion and teacher-student interaction as a perspective for academic research on Great Seal traditions, which permits better explanation of doctrinal variegations.

It follows then, that there is a central Great Seal doctrine originating from the guru and his lineage, taught and adapted to various addressees. Great Seal instruction is pedagogical by nature, and occurs in its specific cultural and historical contexts. Study of the instruction-related genres is vital for its comprehension. Though one may, with biographical studies, argue for a certain approach as 'supreme', solely doctrinal concerns and classifications miss the point of Great Seal practice. It is instead necessary to consider the context of its composition and the genre from which it was taken. Elaborating on the remarks of Sherpa and David Jackson, a genre-sensitive approach is recommended for future analysis of the Great Seal, one which pays attention to specific historical contexts.

The doctrinal elements, stories, and role of the guru revolve around the rhetoric of the experience of a state beyond concepts or, expressed in modern terms, where signification comes to an end. What such practices may lead to is a question which, today, could be examined in the fields of Cognitive Science or Neuropsychology.<sup>3</sup> In the case of historical studies, it is impossible to prove or disprove such claims. One example of this difficulty is evidenced in the Eighth Karmapa's assertion that the Great Seal is crucial to avoid deviation from emptiness and subtle clinging, even after having received the empowerments. The meaning of such accounts and stories is likely, alongside authentication and authority, a simple engender-

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<sup>3</sup> For experience in the Buddhist traditions, see, for example, the contributions in Pickering (1997). Smart (2000: 546) has suggested to employ the help of the sciences in studying religious and meditative experiences.



ing of trust in the practitioner to finally use the practices (as for example in the answer to Gling drung pa).

Thus, these case studies suggest that the Great Seal of the Eighth Karmapa is better understood as an adaptable and flexible pragmatic device, where experience is conceived of as superior to claims of ultimate truth.<sup>4</sup> Instead of overvaluing debates and classifications, Great Seal instructions may be viewed as skilful means, analogous to the famed Mahāyāna concept of *upāya-kauśalya*.<sup>5</sup> This may apply to bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal in general and contributes to an understanding of 'Buddhism' primarily as practice, with the elevation of experience above philosophy, challenging essentialist readings of Buddhist philosophy and their claims of uncovering a 'real' ontology of Buddhism.<sup>6</sup> As Scherer confirms for tantric and the Great Seal traditions:

These statements are true not in an epistemological Popperian sense but true in the sense of meaningful: meaningful pointers, incitements and andragogical motivational devices towards the ultimately inexplicable experiential reality at the end of the path.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis is a first step towards an examination of the complex sources, personalities, and transmissions present in the writings of the Eighth Karmapa, advancing previous research and opening a considerable body of material to future study and academic debate.<sup>8</sup>

Historically, it is difficult to come to terms with Saraha, or locate a coherent system within his teaching.<sup>9</sup> It is also noted of sGam po pa's Great Seal that he was far from presenting any kind of uniform system, a factor which, in sGam po pa's case, is compounded by the fact that most of his works were not, in reality, authored by him. For the Eighth Karmapa,

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<sup>4</sup> The late Zhwa dmar pa, Mi pham Chos kyi blo gros (1952–2014), for example, reported that he is using the ultimate teaching from the Ninth Karmapa's guidebook for both pointing out the nature of mind directly, and as instruction on the completion stage (oral communication, July 2006).

<sup>5</sup> See Pye (2003 [1978]: 1–12) for an introduction to the concept and its terminology.

<sup>6</sup> Scherer (2006b: 6).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> One would need in future to thoroughly study the Karmapa's teaching in all remaining instructions (such as *khrid*, *man ngag*, *gdams ngag*, *bslab bya*, and also *mgur*), comparing it not only with his statements in his *dGongs gcig*, *sKu gsum ngo sprod*, and *rLung sems gnyis med kyi khrid*, but also the *Madyamakāvatāra* and *Abhisamayālamkāra* commentaries. Further study of the *dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung* and shorter commentaries in volume fifteen such as the *Rang la nges pa'i tshad ma* is highly recommended (see Chapter Three (3.3)).

<sup>9</sup> Jackson, R. (2004: 3–53); Braitstein (2004: 16–39).

however, manifold material is at hand and the authorship is clearer, as indicated by early title lists. This opens various avenues of research, some of which were indicated earlier. One will certainly be the Eighth Karmapa's contribution to the systematisations of the Ninth Karmapa and bKra shis rnam rgyal.

While still a hypothesis at the given state of research, it appears the Eighth Karmapa was less systematic, however, at times, more scholastic in his instructions than his successors. But did he, through his commentaries, his founding of institutes, and his political impact, prepare the ground for later, more systematic, approaches to the Great Seal? It will be fruitful to conduct such future investigations with an awareness of textual genres, teaching situations, and their addressees.



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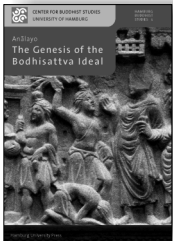
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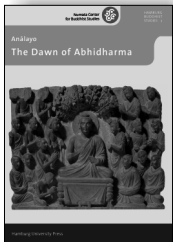
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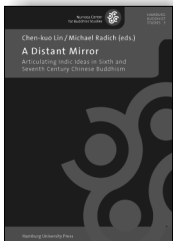
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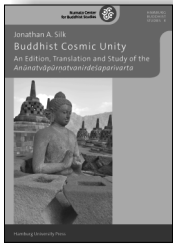
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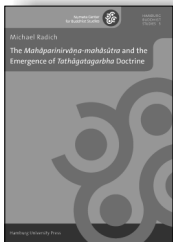
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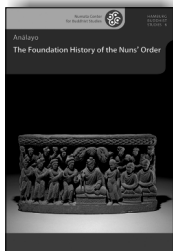
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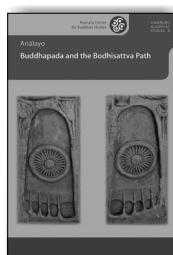
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and his Interpretation of the Great Seal

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Jim Rheingans

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Jim Rheingans

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## Foreword

### About *Hamburg Buddhist Studies*

Ever since the birth of Buddhist Studies in Germany more than 100 years ago, Buddhism has enjoyed a prominent place in the study of Asian religions. The University of Hamburg continues this tradition by focusing research capacities on the religious dimensions of South, Central, and East Asia and making Buddhism a core subject for students of the Asien-Afrika-Institut.

Today, Buddhist Studies as an academic discipline has diversified into a broad spectrum of approaches and methods. Its lines of inquiry cover contemporary issues as much as they delve into the historical aspects of Buddhism. Similarly, the questions shaping the field of Buddhist Studies have broadened. Understanding present-day Buddhist phenomena—and how such phenomena are rooted in and informed by a distant past—is not at all an idle scholarly exercise. Rather, it has become clear that fostering the understanding of one of the world's major religious traditions is a crucial obligation for modern multicultural societies in a globalized world.

Accordingly, *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* addresses Buddhism as one of the great humanistic traditions of philosophical thought, religious praxis, and social life. Its discussions are of interest to scholars of religious studies and specialists of Buddhism, but also aim at confronting Buddhism's rich heritage with questions the answers to which might not easily be deduced by the exclusive use of historical and philological research methods. Such issues require the penetrating insight of scholars who approach Buddhism from a range of disciplines, building upon and yet going beyond the solid study of texts and historical evidence.

We are convinced that *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* will contribute to opening up the field to those who may have no training in the classical source languages of the Buddhist traditions but approach the topic against the background of their own disciplinary interests. With this book series, we encourage a wider audience to take an interest in the academic study of the Buddhist traditions.

## About this Volume

It is our great pleasure to introduce the seventh volume in the *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* book series, a study by Jim Rheingans who is currently Acting Professor of Tibetan Studies at the University of Bonn. His work, a thorough investigation of the Eighth Karmapa's biography and teachings, and some of his *mahāmudrā* instructions in context, is a most welcome contribution to our understanding of the religious history of Tibet and the study of Tibetan Buddhism in general.<sup>1</sup> Rheingans argues for analysing Buddhist instructions for the acquisition of meditative insight, more specifically those of the Tibetan Kagyüpa *mahāmudrā*, as a pragmatic heuristic adapted to the needs of different disciples. This is achieved through case studies of selected texts ascribed to the Eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorje (1507–1554), and by introducing his religious life on the basis of a broad range of primary sources.

Rheingans' book sets out with a survey of a variety of textual sources for the study of the Karmapa's life and works. It shows how traditional spiritual biographies represent Mikyö Dorje primarily according to the ideal of the learned scholar and accomplished meditator, and how this Karmapa subsequently developed into one of the most productive scholars of his tradition who, located within the shifting religious and political hegemonies of his time, managed to acquire a status of singular importance to his school. Rheingans then goes on to critically assess Mikyö Dorje's *mahāmudrā* teachings by examining the instructions in selected texts as well as their respective contexts. His study contends that the Kagyüpa *mahāmudrā* instructions constitute less a static system than independent teachings to be adapted by the guru to different students' requirements. They are thus chiefly characterised by didactic pragmatism.

Rheingans' research interprets a number of previously unstudied Tibetan texts and manuscripts largely from a historical perspective but at times uses approaches from other fields such as narratology. His work not only contributes significant insights to our knowledge of this period in Tibetan religious history but also sets innovative methodological impulses in the study of Tibetan Buddhism.

Michael Zimmermann and Steffen Döll

---

<sup>1</sup> In order to make this foreword and the following preface more readable to a general audience, a phonetic transcription for Tibetan is used. The book itself uses the extended Wylie transcription.

## Preface

This book makes some arguments for analysing Buddhist instructions, more specifically those of the Tibetan Kagyüpa *mahāmudrā*, as a pragmatic heuristic adapted to the students' needs. This is done via case studies of selected writings of Mikyö Dorje<sup>1</sup> (1507–1554) and by introducing his religious life in context. Enthroned in 1513 as the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje would become one of the most productive scholars of the Karma Kagyü tradition, alongside the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339). The Eighth Karmapa's extensive study culminated in the composition of large scholastic commentaries to key Indian Buddhist treatises, such as the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, *Abhidharmakośa*, and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*. Being trained early on by his root guru Sangye Nyenpa in his tradition's core teachings, the *mahāmudrā* (Great Seal) and the Six Doctrines of Nāropa, Mikyö Dorje also elaborated on these esoteric instructions, as, for example, in the extensive *sKu gsum ngo sprod* (*Pointing out the Three Buddha Bodies*) or the *Lung sems gnyis med* (*Differentiating Energy-Wind and Mind*). In addition to countless songs (*mgur*) and further instructions (*khrid*), we find comments on grammar and tantric rituals. In complete his literary oeuvre filled more than thirty volumes. Mikyö Dorje lived in a period of shifting hegemonies, when the Kagyüpa patrons of the Rinpungpa clan were relatively dominant in central and western Tibet. He became an important figure of his time and the traditional spiritual biographies portray him according to the ideal of the learned scholar and accomplished meditator (*mkhas sgrub*).

This book investigates the Eighth Karmapa's life and examines selected Great Seal instructions in context. It sets out with a brief survey of the textual sources for the life and works of the Karmapa. Portraying Mikyö Dorje in a religious and political context, it demonstrates that the Eighth Karmapa is not only portrayed as mastering and teaching the highest meditational precepts of his tradition, but was one of the most significant and most productive scholars of his school. This book argues that analysing his

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<sup>1</sup> In order to make this preface more easily readable, a phonetic transcription for Tibetan is used. This work otherwise uses the extended Wylie transcription.

Great Seal teachings, through the study of instruction-related genres in their historical, doctrinal, and literary contexts, reveals a pedagogical pragmatism. It is crucial to view the Great Seal as an independent key instruction that the guru adapts to students' needs, rather than a fixed doctrine. The book contributes to the religious history of Tibet by interpreting a number of previously unstudied Tibetan sources. The main textual sources consist of various early spiritual biographies (*nam thar*) and religious chronicles (*chos 'byung*) along with meditation instructions (*khrid*), question and answer texts (*dris lan*), esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), and advices (*slab bya*) from the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* (2000–2004).

The research was carried out at and fully funded by Bath Spa University, School of Historical and Cultural Studies, with the external supervision of Professor David Jackson, Hamburg University. It was submitted as doctoral dissertation in 2008 to the University of the West of England, Bristol (who, at that time, held the degree awarding powers for doctorates conducted at Bath Spa). Due to continued requests by colleagues and students, and thanks to their encouragement, I have now decided to make the original version of the dissertation available to the wider public, along with only minor alterations. I am delighted that the series editors Michael Zimmermann and Steffen Döll are presenting this work in the *Hamburg Buddhist Studies Series*.

Naturally, aspects of the research about Mikyö Dorje have evolved over time. Substantial contributions to the life of the Eighth Karmapa as a whole have not been made available since 2008.<sup>2</sup> Some works have appeared that touch on the Karmapa's doctrines or on certain literary, doctrinal, and historical contexts. Let me name some as examples. Certain topics brought up in this book have been further considered in some of my own publications, for example in 'Communicating the Innate' (Ayutthaya: IABU Proceedings, 2012). There is a constant influx of publications concerning the Great Seal in general that are too numerous to mention in detail. Good overviews can be found in the papers in *Mahāmudrā and the Bka'-brgyud Tradition: PIATS 2006*, edited by Roger R. Jackson and Mathew T. Kapstein (Halle: IITBS, 2011)<sup>3</sup> or in the recent *Toward a History of Tibetan Mahāmudrā Traditions (Zentralasiatische Studien 44, Andiast: IITBS, 2015)* edited by Klaus-Dieter Mathes. Among other works, Alexander

<sup>2</sup> Except for my elaboration on the early years of the Karmapa from 2010 (see Chapter Four, note 2).

<sup>3</sup> This volume includes my paper on a question and answer about the Great Seal as also discussed in Chapter Five (5.3).



Schiller's *Die "Vier Yoga"-Stufen der Mahāmudrā-Meditationstradition* (Dept. of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2014) or Andrew Quintman's *The Yogin and the Madman: Reading the Biographical Corpus of Tibet's Great Saint Milarepa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) offer in-depth studies of 'earlier' Tibetan material. Further, there is research underway in current projects about the Great Seal at the University of Vienna: The Indian/Indo-Tibetan background is further explored in Mathes' *A Fine Blend of Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015). A work that had used this book in its prior thesis format has been published after this book had been submitted to the editors: Martina Draszczyk and David Higgins, *Mahāmudrā and the Middle Way: Post-Classical Kagyü Discourses on Mind, Emptiness and Buddha-Nature* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 2016). They have worked closely with some Great Seal related texts of Mikyö Dorje (some of which I had singled out earlier in my thesis) and address the discourses specific to the historical period.

The context of genre had been specifically highlighted in my dissertation of 2008 that is now published here. Marta Sernesi and Ulrich T. Kragh have also addressed authorship and—to some extent—genre as significant issues in the study of the Great Seal traditions.<sup>4</sup> Approaches to Tibetan *nam thar* and hagiographies of other 'non-occidental' cultures are, among others, discussed in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing*, edited by Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014), where the methods from narratology presented in this book are elaborated (as, for example, in my paper 'Narratology in Buddhist Studies', *ibid.* 69–112). Especially Ulrike Roesler's paper in the aforementioned volume provides a very good overview of the *nam thar* genre.<sup>5</sup>

Some recent publications are connected to historical contexts pertaining to this thesis, for example Olaf Czaja's *Medieval Rule in Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der ÖAW, 2013) or certain remarks in Franz-Karl Ehrhard's paper

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<sup>4</sup> Marta Sernesi, 'The Collected Sayings of the Master: Oral and Written Transmissions and the Authority of Tradition,' *JIAS* 36–37 no. 1–2 (2013, 2014, [2015]), 459–498. Ulrich T. Kragh, 'The Significant Leap from Writing to Print: Editorial Modification in the First Printed Edition of the Collected Works of Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen,' *JIAS* 7 (2013), 365–425.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrike Roesler, 'Operas, Novels, and Religious Instructions: life-stories of Tibetan Buddhist masters between genre classifications,' in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014), 113–140.

about a *Padma'i thang yig*.<sup>6</sup> I expect that the completed dissertation about the Fourth Shamar Incarnate (1453–1524) by Kamilla Mojzes<sup>7</sup> will shed further light on the relation between Mikyö Dorje and the Fourth Shamar incarnate. The proceedings of the conference 'Towards a History of 15th Century Tibet: Cultural Blossoming, Religious Fervour, and Political Unrest' held in March 2015 at the Lumbini International Research Institute, are currently prepared by Volker Caumanns and Marta Sernesi for publication. The papers contained will further contribute to our understanding of this period in general.

With regard to Tibetan sources, some later editions of the collected writings of the Eighth Karmapa and previously unavailable shorter *rnam thar* have been made accessible since 2008. Yuyan Zhong's Master's thesis (LMU Munich, 2013) about the songs from 'Bri gung as documented in the *Handschrift Cod.tibet.5* (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) is another useful contribution concerning this specific part of the Karmapa's writings.

These publications do not significantly change the substance of this research. Although not all of them could be taken into account in detail, the academic works relevant to this research have been mentioned above and crucial ones are incorporated in this book. Those not already mentioned here are further indicated in footnotes in the respective chapters and sections for additional reference. Currently, the abovementioned Tibetan sources and literature relevant to the Karmapa's *gsung 'bum* are examined for my project on the origin and transmissions of Mikyö Dorje's writings that will be available as a future publication.

A project of this scope is almost impossible without funding. Therefore, I would like to wholeheartedly thank Bath Spa University's School of Historical and Cultural Studies for their generous three-year dissertation fellowship. The Tārā-Foundation granted a one-year fellowship in order to complete this research. The final publication would not have been possible without the ITAS-Numata Research Fellowship that supports the publication of research on Mikyö Dorje and a forthcoming volume on the Sakya and Kagyü luminary Karma Thrinlepa (1456–1539); I would like to thank Pedro and Dorrit Gomez and Peter Gomez-Hansen for their help in this

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<sup>6</sup> "'Ocean of Marvelous Perfections": A 17th century *Padma'i thang yig* from the Sa-skya-pa school,' in *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation*, ed. Jim Rheingans (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 139–181.

<sup>7</sup> The doctoral research 'The Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Incarnate: A Comprehensive Study of the Life and Works of Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524)' is carried out at the University of Bonn under the supervision of Peter Schwieger and the author's co-supervision.

matter. I would further like to thank the Buddhismus Stiftung Diamantweg for covering the printing costs for this volume.

Although at times carried out in retreat-like solitude, this work, as all research endeavours, did not emerge from the effort of a single individual but was only possible through the support of many colleagues and friends who are too numerous to mention. My deep gratitude goes to my supervisors David Jackson, Mahinda Deegalle, and Fiona Montgomery. Khenpo Karma Ngedön was extremely helpful in discussing matters of Tibetan language. I would like to extend special thanks to Burkhard Scherer for his encouragement in finding funding and his critical comments. Gene Smith and Burkhard Quessel were essential for inquiries about Tibetan sources at the outset of this research. I would like to thank the late Kunzig Shamarpa Mipham Chökyi Lodrö (1952–2014) and Maniwa Karma Sherab Gyaltzen Rinpoche for sharing their knowledge about Tibetan textual sources and doctrinal issues related to this research. Franz-Karl Ehrhard, Klaus-Dieter Mathes, Alexander Schiller, Frank Müller-Witte, Manfred Seegers, Maria Bjerregaard, Volker Caumanns, and Roger Jackson were always ready to share their erudite suggestions and comments. Denise Cush, Paul Davies, and the staff of Study of Religions at Bath Spa University along with Rupert Gethin, Paul Williams, and Rita Langer of Bristol University created a vibrant research environment and stimulating discussion during numerous World View Society talks, Graduate School seminars, and joint Postgraduate Conferences. I would like to acknowledge Anthony Bristow, John O'Donnel, Julian Schott, and Anna Rheingans for their expertise in different types of proofreading and Miroslav Hrdina for his knowledgeable and diligent support in technical and editorial issues. The series editors and the staff of the Projektverlag were very helpful during the process of publication. Finally, I would like to thank Andrea Dansauer, Anja-Karina Pahl, and Jeffrey Inwood for their general support during the process of this project. Of course all mistakes remain the author's responsibility. Naturally, there was a limit to incorporating further sources and literature; also, in retrospective, I would approach some of the issues differently.<sup>8</sup> I nevertheless hope that this contribution is a first step on the way for future research in the field of the Eighth Karmapa.

This book is structured as follows: Chapter One engages with previous research and justifies the methodologies employed. Chapter Two elaborates

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<sup>8</sup> The forthcoming volume on Mikyö Dorje's writings as an exemplary study of a Tibetan textual corpus will shed more light on the specific topic of textual transmissions and literary history.

key points of the Kagyüpa Great Seal and the religious and political contexts of the Eighth Karmapa. Chapter Three evaluates the main textual sources and genres used. Chapter Four delineates the Eighth Karmapa's development into one of the most renowned scholars and mystical teachers in his tradition and outlines his programme for teaching meditation. Chapter Five investigates concrete teaching situations in three case studies, showing divergent expressions of the Great Seal and their contexts. Chapter Six argues that the Great Seal is an independent instruction conveying the essence of the teachings, which can be taught as either tantric or non-tantric, and establishes the teacher as the main unifying spiritual element of Great Seal instructions and practices. Chapter Seven concludes by asserting the importance of contexts, such as genre and history, in the study of Buddhist mysticism.

## Conventions used

### Transliteration

Tibetan characters are transliterated according to the system of Turrel W. Wylie as laid out in ‘A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription’ (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 22 (1959), 261–267) in its extended form. When a Tibetan word is capitalised, the root letter is written in capitals. Two frequently used Tibetan titles were not transliterated: Karmapa and Dalai Lama. The Indian names that the Tibetan traditions added a *pa* are displayed in a more concise manner: Maitrī pa = Maitrīpa, Nāro pa = Nāropa.

Foreign language terms found in the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, second edition, revised (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) are not italicised. Sanskrit (written with diacritics): bodhisattva, dharma, saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, saṅgha, siddha, stūpa, sūtra, tantra; Tibetan: lama (except for occurrences in a name), Lhasa, Shigatse; Greek: topos.

### Referencing

The sources regarding the Eighth Karmapa are cited from the Tibetan standard edition of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, published 2000–2004. When a further edition of any text is used, the specific reference to this particular edition will be provided.

## Abbreviations

### *General Abbreviations*

<b>HR</b>	<i>History of Religion</i>
<b>IATS</b>	International Association of Tibetan Studies
<b>IITBS</b>	International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies
<b>JAOS</b>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<b>JIABS</b>	<i>Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies</i>
<b>JIATS</b>	<i>Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies</i>
<b>JIPh</b>	<i>Journal of Indian Philosophy</i>
<b>JTS</b>	<i>Journal of the Tibet Society</i>
<b>LTWA</b>	Library of Tibetan Works and Archives
<b>NGMPP</b>	Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project
<b>PIATS</b>	Proceedings of the Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies

### *Abbreviated Tibetan Texts*

If the abbreviation consists of words from the title of the source, the abbreviation is italicised. The abbreviation usually goes back to words within the title or to the author; for clarity original words are marked in bold.

***A khu A khra***

dGe slong Byang chub bzang po, **A khu a khra** (b. sixteenth century). *rGyal ba kun gyi dbang po dPal ldan karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i zhabs kyi dgung lo bdun phan gyi nam par thar pa nor bu'i phreng ba* [*The Spiritual Biography up to the Seventh Year of the Glorious Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje, the Mighty One of All Jinās: A Garland of Jewels*]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 33–106, 37 fols.

***'Bras spungs dkar chag***

'Bras spungs (Monastery) dPal brtsegs Bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang (eds.). **'Bras spungs dgon du bzhugs su gsol ba'i dpe rnying dkar chag** [*The List of Old Books which were Placed in the Monastery of 'Bras spungs*]. 2 vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe krung khang, 2005.

***Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa***

Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII (1507–1554). *dPal rgyal ba karma pa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i gsung 'bum* [*The Collected Works of Mi bskyod rdo rje, the Eighth Incarnation in the Line of the Glorious Victor Karmapa*]. 26 vols. Lhasa: dPal brtsegs Bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang, 2000–2004. Phyogs bsgrigs theng dang po [First edition]. (Printed from blocks kept at 'Bras spungs dGa' ldan Pho brang and Khams dPal spungs dgon, later reset electronically in Tibet. Distributed by the Tsadra Foundation, New York.)

***dKar chag***

dKon mehog 'bangs, Zhwa dmar V (1525–1583). *rGyal ba thams cad kyi ye shes kyi sku nam pa thams cad pa'i thugs can karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje bzhad pa'i gsung 'bum gyi dkar chag* [*The Table of Contents of the Collected Works of Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje bzhad pa, who has the Enlightened Mind which Consists of All Expressions of the Jñānakāya of All Jinās*]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 1–28, 14 fols.

***Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta***

*dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad dpal ldan dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal lung dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* [The Exposition of the Madhyamakāvatāra, Words of the Glorious Dus gsum mkhyen pa, Chariot of the Siddhas of the Dwags po-Lineage]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 14, pp. 1–975, 487 fols.

***gDams ngag mdzod***

Kong sprul bLo gros mtha' yas, 'Jam mgon (1813–1899) (ed.); Chandra, Lokesh (ed.) *gDams ngag mdzod: A Treasury of Instructions*. 12 vols. Delhi: N. Lungtog, N. Gyaltsan, 1971. (Reproduced from a Xylographic print from the dPal spungs blocks.)

***Kam tshang***

Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699/1700–1774) and 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab. *bKa' brgyud gser phreng rnam thar zla ba chu sel gyi phreng ba smad cha* (The Golden Garland of Kagyu Biographies, vol. 2). Sarnath: Vajra Vidya Institute Library, 2004. (Reprint of: *sGrub brgyud karma kam tshang brgyud pa rnam thar rin po che'i rnam par thar pa rab 'byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba*.)

***Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs***

Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII (1507–1554). *Byang phyogs 'di na karma pa/ rim par byon las bdun pa rang byung ni/ kun mkhyen chos rje'i slob mar gyur 'ga' yi/ bka' 'bangs mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* [The Succession of Deeds of Mi bskyod rdo rje. He obeys the Command of Some Students of the Omniscient Master, the Self Arisen Seventh among the Karmapas, who have appeared One after the Other (rim par) in this Northern Land]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 350–387, 19 fols.



***mKhas pa'i dga' ston***

gTsug lag phreng ba, dPa' bo II (1504–1566). *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* [History of Religion: A Feast for the Scholars]. 2 vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1986.

***Phag gru gsung 'bum***

Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170). *Dus gsum sangs rgyas thams cad kyi thugs rje'i rnam rol dpal ldan phag gru rdo rje rgyal po mchog gi gsung 'bum rin po che glegs bam*—The Collected Works of Phag mo gru pa. 9 vols. Kathmandu: Khenpo Shedub Tenzin and Lama Thinley Namgyal, 2003.

***Phag gru bka' 'bum***

Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170). *Phag mo'i gru pa'i bka' 'bum* [Collected Writings of Phag mo gru pa]. Manuscript edited by Kun dga' rin chen Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1475–1527) in 'Bri gung, 1507. 4 vols. NGMPP, Reel No. E 3169/1, E 3170/1, E 3171/1, 1998. (Photo-mechanical reproduction of a manuscript from the library of Che tsang Rinpoche in Byang chub gling, Dehradun.)

***Phyag chen mdzod***

Mi pham chos kyi blo gros, Zhwa dmar pa XIV (1952–2014) (ed.). *Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i khrid mdzod* [The Treasury of Meditation Instructions of the Great Seal, the Ultimate Meaning]. New Delhi, 1998. (Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center W 23447.)

***Q***

Suzuki, Daisetz T. (ed.). *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka: Peking Edition*. Tokyo, Kyoto: Tibetan Tripiṭaka Research Institute, 1955–1961.

***rGya gzhung***

Mi pham chos kyi blo gros, Zhwa dmar pa XIV (1952–2014) (ed.). *Phyag rgya chen po'i rgya gzhung* [The Indian Treatises of the Great Seal]. In *Phyag chen mdzod*, vols. *om*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*.

***Sangs rgyas dpal grub***

**Sangs rgyas dpal grub** (sixteenth century). *rGyal ba spyan ras gzigs dbang brgyad pa'i nam thar legs spyad ma'i don 'grel gsal ba'i sgron me* [The Spiritual Biography of the Jina Avalokiteśvara, the Mighty Eighth (Karmapa), a Commentary on the Meaning of (his) Good Deeds: Illuminating Light]. In *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 150–329, 90 fols.

***Zhang Yisun***

**Zhang Yisun** et. al. (ed.). *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* [The Great Tibetan–Chinese Dictionary]. 2 vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Research into early Buddhism has indicated that communicating the experience of freedom from suffering to specific individuals has always been at the heart of the Buddha's teaching. He was interested in benefiting his students, not in creating a philosophical system in an ontological sense.<sup>1</sup> The Buddha's aim can thus be viewed as pedagogical rather than ontological.<sup>2</sup>

Close readings of Pāli textual material have demonstrated that analysing the contexts of the addressee and the prevalent Indian spiritual and intellectual traditions is crucial for understanding his teachings. Gombrich remarks: 'If we had a true record of the Buddha's words, I think we would find that during his preaching career of forty-five years he had expressed himself in an enormous number of different ways.'<sup>3</sup>

The Great Seal (Skt. *mahāmudrā*, Tib. *phyag rgya chen po*) instructions of the Eighth Karmapa, Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), contain such a number of varied expressions, and, more importantly, this vast corpus of textual witnesses was put into writing either during his life or shortly

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<sup>1</sup> Gombrich (1996: 7, 18, 37) and Scherer (2006b: 4) argue for a non-essentialist understanding of Buddhism. For the Buddha's emphasis on experience, see for example Gombrich (1996: 28). Schmithausen (1973a: 180–186 and 1976: 236–237) has indicated that Buddhist theories of *viññaptimātra* and *cittamātra* have emerged from spiritual practices such as 'reflection on visionary objects of meditation' (ibid. 249). For further studies on early Buddhism, see Vetter (1988), Gombrich (1988), Ruegg and Schmithausen (1990), Hoffman and Deegalle (1996), and Hamilton (2000).

<sup>2</sup> Scherer (2006b: 1) has coined the term 'andragogical'. This expression emphasises guidance for grown up beings rather than children (from Greek *aner*, genitive *andros* – 'man' rather than *pais* – 'boy, child' and *agogos* – 'guide').

<sup>3</sup> Gombrich (1996: 19). He also argues that the metaphors, allusions, and debates used by the Buddha were comprehended insufficiently by both the early Asian commentators and Western academics (for example the word *dhamma* and Brahmanical concept of dharma on ibid. 34–38; for better understanding Buddhist dharma theory through non-Buddhist contexts, see Bronkhorst 1985: 318–319). Not all Gombrich's theses are unproblematic and, at times, lack textual evidence, although his thought-provoking ideas have been acknowledged (see the review by Maitrimurti and von Rospatt 1998: 174).

thereafter. Specific genres containing Great Seal instructions constitute valuable sources for achieving insight into the bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal as a pragmatic heuristic suited to the students' differing capacities and inclinations.

Among Buddhist traditions, those of Tibet perhaps stand out most for their blend of meditative systems, centred on various instructions (*gdams ngag*) and their lineages. They were considered to have their origin with the Buddha, being transmitted via a teacher through a line of closely associated students.<sup>4</sup> Also well-known are the illustrious masters of these lineages, eccentric *yogins* or *yoginīs*, reincarnate lamas, and religio-political leaders.<sup>5</sup>

The Great Seal practised in the various bKa' brgyud lineages is one such meditative technique. In essence, the Great Seal of the bKa' brgyud pa contains immediate instructions for achieving Buddhahood by transcending conceptual thinking (Skt. *prapañca*, *vikalpa*) and directly perceiving the nature of mind.<sup>6</sup> Tibetan meditation masters of the bKa' brgyud lineages claim that the Great Seal and its practice reveal the ultimate truth behind all teachings. They maintain that the Great Seal contains the 'hidden meaning' of the doctrines of *sūtra* and *tantra* of the Tibetan canon.<sup>7</sup>

The bKa' brgyud traditions in medieval Tibet believed that it was Nāropa who was the main transmitter of the Great Seal within tantric practice and yogic exercise (later called *tantra* or *mantra* Great Seal), whereas they held that Maitrīpa and Saraha also taught the Great Seal

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<sup>4</sup> The late nineteenth century masters of the non-sectarian movement, such as Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899), have distinguished eight instruction lineages (see Kapstein 1996, 2007: 116). Most of the lineages originating from the new translation period are based on instructional texts which have a mystic origin as oral 'vajra verses' (*rdo rje'i tshig rkang*) that were later put into writing. Davidson (2004: 149–151) has termed some of them 'gray texts'. He has argued that they emerged from the collaboration of Indian scholars and Tibetan translators and present the unfolding of the esoteric traditions in a new environment.

<sup>5</sup> For the reception of Tibet in the West and the related imaginations, see, for example, Donald Lopez's *Prisoners of Shangrila* (1998) and its critique by Germano (2005: 165–167). See also Huber (1997) and Dodin (2001: 1–32).

<sup>6</sup> Beyer (1975: 148) has distinguished three kinds of Mahāyāna Buddhist meditation technique: standard (insight and calm abiding), visionary and ecstatic (the stages of tantric meditation) and spontaneous techniques. Among these, the Great Seal of the bKa' brgyud pa—or at least some facets of it—can be described as a 'spontaneous' technique of enlightenment.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the fifteenth-century scholar Karma 'phrin las pa I, Phyogs las mnam rgyal, *Dris lan*, p. 136, and the translation of the *Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā* (*Phyag chen zla ba'i 'od zer*) Namgyal (1986: 97–116). Also see contemporary traditional commentaries, such as Thrangu Rinpoche (2004).

outside tantric contexts. Such an approach was propagated by sGam po pa (1079–1153).<sup>8</sup>

Though often considered a primarily meditation-orientated lineage, the bKa' brgyud pa traditions have produced numerous scholars.<sup>9</sup> Among them, the Eighth Karmapa was considered one of the most learned masters within the Karma bKa' brgyud sub-school, which enjoyed great support from the most powerful rulers of Tibet from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries (particularly the period of 1498–1517/18).<sup>10</sup> The Seventh Karmapa, Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506), had initiated an own sūtra exegetical tradition of the great treatises within his sect during a period of growing systematisation.<sup>11</sup> This scholastic trend was enhanced by the Eighth Karmapa, whose agenda included commenting on four of the five main non-tantric subjects.<sup>12</sup> He was a prolific writer on tantric Buddhist and other traditional fields of knowledge, and his oeuvre fills more than thirty volumes.

Previous academic research has concentrated mainly on his well-known scholastic commentaries such as those on the *Madhyamakāvatāra* and *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, and the *gZhan stong legs par smra ba'i sgron me* (*The Light which Expresses the gZhan stong [Doctrine] Well*).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For sGam po pa's Great Seal, see Kragh (1998: 12–26) and Sherpa (2004: 129–184).

<sup>9</sup> Over the course of history, the various bKa' brgyud schools have oscillated between scholastic institutionalisation and mystic reform. In the bKa' brgyud lineages, this particularly refers to the movement of the 'crazy yogins' (*smyon pa*), which is briefly described by Smith (2001: 59–61) and Stein (1993: 170–172). See also Kögler (2004: 25–55), who suggests that this movement emerged due to social factors such as the absence of central political authority and the important role of the clergy. Recent publications on this topic are Stefan Larsson, 'The Birth of a Heruka: How Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan became Gtsang smyon Heruka: A Study of a Mad Yogin' (Phd. diss., Stockholm University, 2009) and David Di Valerio, *The Holy Madmen of Tibet* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> From 1498 to 1518 the Rin spungs pa lords, supporters of the Seventh Karmapa and the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, ruled over dBus and gTsang with an iron fist (Jackson, D. 1989a: 29–30). The Eighth Karmapa witnessed the transmission from relative peace and strong central rule to increasing instability, especially in dBus, culminating in the period of great unrest in the late 1540s.

<sup>11</sup> He composed the only Karma bKa' brgyud work on Pramāṇa (Chos grags rgya mtsho, Karmapa VII, *Tshad ma'i bstan bcos*).

<sup>12</sup> Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, Prajñāparāmitā, Vinaya, and Pramāṇa (see Brunnhölzl 2004: 19).

<sup>13</sup> For previous academic research on the Eighth Karmapa, see the literature review in this chapter.

Though Great Seal teachings form the heart of his tradition's religious instructions, and though the Eighth Karmapa is considered one of the most distinguished scholars within his school, no one has academically investigated the Eighth Karmapa's life or how he taught the Great Seal to his students. The recent publication of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, the largest part of his writings, has also not yet been taken into account.

### *1.1 Aim and Scope of this Research*

This thesis argues that analysing the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal teachings through studying particular textual genres in their historical, doctrinal, and literary contexts, reveals a certain pedagogical pragmatism in relation to specific students. This suggests that, analogous to findings about early Buddhist meditation, the bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal instructions are better viewed as a pragmatic heuristic, emerging from the dynamics of the teacher-student interaction in its various contexts. This thesis provides the historical context of the Eighth Karmapa's life, demonstrating that he was one of the most significant scholars of his school, next to the Third Karmapa, and adept in its highest meditational instruction. Thus, the primary objective of this research is to investigate for the first time the Eighth Karmapa's life and selected Great Seal teachings, examining how he lived, studied the Great Seal, and taught it to specific students in a variety of contexts.

As will be illustrated in the literature review, the small amount of Great Seal research done embarked upon the necessary tasks of analysing its terminology, doctrinal development, and systematisation. However, because meditation and realisation are central to the traditions in which it is practised, it may be difficult to pin down the Great Seal to any single doctrinal system. And, beyond doctrinal debates and systematisations, it is the interaction between teacher and student that forms the core of Great Seal practice and teaching. Therefore, research into Great Seal traditions may also benefit from a close contextual and historical investigation, concentrating on the teacher and his instructions, that takes into account differences in both textual genres and practitioners.

In order to do so, particular textual genres were chosen. 'Spiritual biographies' (*mam thar*) and 'spiritual memoirs' (*rang mam*) are used in analysing the historical, cultural, and political contexts of the Karmapa's life, with an emphasis on his roles as scholarly monk, mystical teacher, and

influential political figure.<sup>14</sup> With regard to the Great Seal, the study focuses on its (bKa' brgyud specific) teaching and practice as expressed in dialogues found in a spiritual biography (*rnam thar*), question and answer texts (Tib. *dris lan*), meditation instructions (*khrid*), esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), and pieces of advice (*bslab bya*) written by the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>15</sup>

These genres offer valuable prospects for investigating Great Seal practice and its contexts. Questions and answers often contain short treatments of doctrinal questions loaded with meaning. Genres such as meditation instructions, esoteric precepts, and advices have similar special qualities, since they aim at condensing the Buddhist teachings to the essential points and conveying these points efficiently for practice. Such a goal can also be encouraged by teachings presented as dialogues within the spiritual biographies of the Eighth Karmapa.

At first, selected instances from these textual genres are examined in detailed case studies. Then the Great Seal teaching and the Karmapa's interpretations of it are contextualised, focusing on non-tantric Great Seal and the role of the teacher. Most sources employed are taken from the recently published *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* in twenty-six volumes. The scope of this research therefore includes the necessary historical survey, and Chapter Three is devoted entirely to evaluating the textual sources and genres in detail.

This thesis is thus not centrally a philosophical or doctrinal study, but an attempt to cover new ground in researching the life and writings of the Eighth Karmapa, examining particular teaching situations as documented in different textual genres, with a focus on Great Seal instruction and practice. It interprets a number of previously unstudied Tibetan language sources, and also offers a means by which to approach such an undertaking: its method of case studies in context.

Naturally, every study has its limits in both time and scope. Given the sheer bulk of the textual material, this research cannot take all writings within the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* into full account (though

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<sup>14</sup> In *Civilized Shamans* (1993: 12–22) and *Tantric Revisionings* (2005: 13–17), Geoffrey Samuel has used slightly different dimensions, using the terms 'clerical' and 'shamanic'.

<sup>15</sup> Here, the main textual genres are briefly introduced in order to illustrate their suitability for this thesis; they are treated in more detail in Chapter Three (3.3, 3.4). Although these genres hold a central place in Tibetan Buddhist life and culture, they have not yet been thoroughly studied. *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, edited by Cabezón and Jackson (1996) does not study the question and answer genres. It includes a treatment of the slightly related genres of the graded teachings (*bstan rim*) (Jackson, D. 1996: esp. 241–243) and instructions (*gdams ngag*) (Kapstein 1996: 275).

every text has been surveyed). Also, the focus must be limited to the main events of his life and to selected shorter instructions focusing mainly on the Great Seal of Saraha, Maitrīpa, and sGam po pa. However, a broader doctrinal context of some of the Karmapa's other treatises, as well as the historical and religious context will be considered where possible.

## 1.2 Methodologies Employed

Scholars in Buddhist Studies have only recently started to debate their methodological claims, derived primarily from philology and history.<sup>16</sup> The shift of paradigm or 'linguistic turn' in the humanities did not leave Buddhist and Tibetan Studies unchallenged.<sup>17</sup> Still, even otherwise excellent academic works in Tibetan Buddhist Studies are sometimes written in the complete absence of any explicitly stated methodology.<sup>18</sup> Within the debates in the field, Cabezón has suggested a mutual and critical understanding of philological and critical perspectives.<sup>19</sup>

In this thesis, it is held that methodologies should be suited to the sources and aims of the research. Considering mutual understanding as suggested by Cabezón in accordance with the demands of this thesis, it utilises different methodological approaches to varying degrees: it is prima-

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<sup>16</sup> Gomez (1995: 183).

<sup>17</sup> The *JlABS* vol. 18 (1995) contains various papers dedicated to theories in Buddhist Studies; see Gomez (1995: 193–196) for the ideas of 'higher criticism' in Buddhist Studies, and Cabezón (1995: 243–246) for some stereotypes of Buddhist scholars' theories. There have also been attempts at creating an academic 'Buddhist Theology' (see Jackson and Makransky 2003). For a discussion of 'New Cultural History', see Hunt (1989: 21–22). For a defence and debate of history in light of challenging the idea of objective knowledge 'outside the text' (*déhors texte*), or knowledge about the past, see, for example, Evans (1997: 94–96).

<sup>18</sup> For example, in his ground breaking *Mipham's Dialectics and the Debates on Emptiness*, Phuntsho (2005: 19–20) exposes his method only in passing. His work offers an impressive exploration in the field of Mipham Namgyal and his *Madhyamaka*. In a short paragraph called 'Sources and methodological considerations' (ibid. 19), he claims to undertake a thematic treatment of the debates on emptiness relying on crucial texts. He adds that his 'role in presenting this is no more than that of the commentator of a football match, giving both a narrative account and an analytic treatment of the philosophical contest that took place between Mipham and the dGe lugs pa opposition' (ibid.).

<sup>19</sup> Cabezón (1995: 251). Though Marwick (2001: 18, 136, 266–273) has argued that to combine historical and cultural approaches may be confusing, this thesis holds with Cabezón that one can use both, if done carefully. Biersack (1989: 73–86) reviews influences of Geertz on history and anthropology, suggesting that a certain multidimensionality may unite those approaches (ibid. 96).



rily grounded on the philological and historical methodologies. In doing so, it takes a phenomenological perspective of ‘ad hoc hermeneutics’ on religion and religious texts, where one tries to understand and interpret a religious tradition in its own terms, attempting to interpret it ‘both sympathetically and critically’.<sup>20</sup> Occasionally, modern and post-modern literary theories such as intertextuality and narratology are employed for comprehending the genre of spiritual biographies (*rnam thar*).<sup>21</sup>

As this thesis strives to contribute to knowledge about past religious practices and their contexts on the basis of Tibetan textual sources, use of historical and philological methodologies is indispensable. In Tibetan Buddhist Studies, many areas have yet to be studied and many artefacts have already been destroyed. Most textual sources are untranslated, and many remain undiscovered. However, there is a large, and still growing, bulk of available textual material. The *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* consist of twenty-six volumes containing over two-hundred and fifty texts. Works of the Karmapa’s contemporaries have also yet to be studied extensively by scholars, and those sources on non-religious issues are often missing altogether. The nature of the classical Tibetan language along with the poor quality of dictionaries impedes the linguistic and cultural understanding of texts, demanding, at times, the skills of a lexicographer. Exhaustive encyclopaedias and bibliographies are not available.

Research into medieval Tibetan Buddhism, therefore, requires considerable philological and historical work, and this thesis heavily employs these approaches. Primarily for surveying, dating, and critically evaluating the Tibetan textual sources and their authorship, as well as reading and translating them when necessary.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Green (2005: 406); see also *ibid.* 404–406 and below. In his study of the Great Seal instructions of Zhang, Martin (1992: 244–253) has emphasised that a meditation-centred system like the Great Seal needs to be understood with its own voice.

<sup>21</sup> In his *Moderne Literaturtheorie und Antike Texte*, Schmitz (2002) describes how modern literary theory was applied to classical texts (see *ibid.* 55–75, for narratology and *ibid.* 91–99, for intertextuality). For applications of narratology see also Scherer (2006c: 2–7); for narratology, see Bal (1997) and Stanzel (1995). For a further attempt at analysing hagiographies including Tibetan *rnam thar* with in part narratological methods, see Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans, ‘Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: An Introduction,’ in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*, ed. *ibid.* (Berlin: EB-Verlag), 7–19 and the ‘Outlook’ (in *ibid.* 305–309) as well as the papers contained.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Historical’ is understood in the sense of doing source-based history without *a priori* theories. ‘Philological’ means, in this context, that passages are translated with philological precision and an astute awareness of the meanings of terms and their contexts. For such a

Translation and doing history are directly connected to interpretation. The textual hermeneutics, how to interpret a text and its context, and how to present the findings adequately, need to be briefly addressed. Since this research deals with texts and practices from a different culture, it intends to initially approach the religious ideas and concepts of genre from an empathic perspective, particularly when dealing with the Karmapa's interpretations of the Great Seal.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the thesis aims at an emic reading of both text and religious practices, attempting an undistorted *Verstehen*. It tries to understand texts, contexts, and religious practices using categories and terms employed by the tradition.<sup>24</sup>

Subsequently, the findings will be critically analysed and contextualised. As was indicated previously, the general approach is to investigate the Great Seal teaching of the Eighth Karmapa as expressed to specific students in its historical, doctrinal, and literary contexts. Firstly therefore, the thesis provides the context of the Eighth Karmapa's religious career.<sup>25</sup>

For examining the teachings to different students, a presentation in the form of case studies with a clear focus is chosen.<sup>26</sup> While relying on a dialogue, a question and answer text, and two meditation instructions, the presentation alternates between translation of crucial passages and analysis of historical context and doctrinal content. This is advantageous for the

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historical approach that attempts to uncover knowledge about the past, see, for example, the basic assumptions of Marwick (2001: xv, 3–4, 17–20). With regard to the importance of philology, Tillemans (1995: 277) states: 'Buddhist Studies insufficiently grounded upon, lacking, or even contemptuous of philology is an unpalatable, albeit increasingly likely, prospect for the future. It would add insult to injury if mediocre scholars justified or hastened this unfortunate turn of events by invoking postmodern buzzwords.' In *Religion: The Basics* (2003: 162), Nye comments: 'The answer may be to not trust any translation but one's own, and so to read the text in its original language (in this case Sanskrit). For in-depth study of a particular religious tradition and culture this is essential—it is not enough to rely on any person's translation, the student is expected to learn the language(s) of the original.' For a specific philological approach, see also Sheldon Pollock, 'Philology in Three Dimensions' (*postmedieval* v. 5.4, 2014). For the importance and difficulty of translating terms accurately, see Dreyfus (2001: 168–169).

<sup>23</sup> See Cabezon (2000: 234–240): a short article which discusses authorship in medieval Buddhist Tibet.

<sup>24</sup> Ruegg (1995: 157) has argued that it is important to try to assume an emic position: 'trying to place ourselves in the cultural contexts and intellectual horizons of the traditions we are studying, making use of their own intellectual and cultural categories and seeking as it were to "think along" with these traditions.' See also Green (2005: 404).

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed analysis of the genre and the sources, see Chapter Three (3.3, 3.4). For further information, colophons of the Eighth Karmapa's writings and title lists (*dkar chag*) are used.

<sup>26</sup> With its focus on practice and diverse contexts, this approach bears some similarities to the one chosen by the Princeton Readings in Religion (Lopez 2000: v).

purpose of this book and well suited for research that represents the first foray into previously unstudied sources. Ample evidence on a particular religious teaching, its addressee and teacher is gathered, focused upon and interpreted, thus providing, as it were, a ‘thick description’.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, sole fixation on scripture and the doctrinal system is avoided; a tendency that was indicated by Gomez or Schopen.<sup>28</sup> Though, in the case of the Eighth Karmapa, archaeological or art historical evidence is not at hand, this thesis uses the textual sources (as much as they allow) for the purpose of exploring contexts within and beyond normative doctrines.

To enrich the examination, the genre of spiritual biographies and its religious function will, at times, be combined with tools from narratology. Narratology itself has not been used in Tibetan studies, although some of it appears to be particularly suitable for the analysis of spiritual biographies. An example of coming to terms with Buddhist religious phenomena through the help of narratology is Ohnuma’s analysis of the gift of body in Indian Buddhist literature.<sup>29</sup>

In the enterprise of historical and narratological analysis one must be careful to neither construct an artificial alterity of Tibetan culture and

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<sup>27</sup> This famous term coined in *The Interpretation of Cultures* by Geertz (1973: 10, 15–16, 29) is here understood in a metaphorical sense; yet, the concept of concentrating on a selected phenomenon and interpreting it remains. However, no broader generalisations about Tibetan religion or culture are derived from it. For a discussion of this method in the context of cultural history, see also Biersack (1989: 73–80); for its criticism, see Crapanzano (1986: 74). In ‘Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians’, Walters (1980: 551), despite a certain criticism, considers Geertz’s attention to particular phenomena a strength.

<sup>28</sup> Gomez (1995: 192–196) has pointed out that much of Buddhist Studies, and its search for ‘truth’, is based on the written scriptural word and the doctrinal system. Schopen (1997: 7) has argued that most scholars in Indian Buddhist Studies have tended to overemphasise literary sources, pointing towards archaeological evidence. Huntington (2007: 218–219), critically evaluating Schopen’s approach, reduced it to an opposition of ‘Buddhist normative doctrine’ versus ‘Buddhist popular practice’, which is not much different from nineteenth-century sociologists like Durkheim. See Huntington (2007: 207–227), for a discussion of the approaches of Schmithausen (1981), Vetter (1988), Gombrich (1988), and Ruegg and Schmithausen (1990). Barret (2005: 126–128) has pointed out that the term ‘history’ has no sanctioned form in most of the Buddhist religious traditions studied and a dubious status in recent academic scholarship.

<sup>29</sup> Ohnuma (1998: 324, 335–346) examines what she calls ‘gift of body stories’ *dehadāna* and the literalisation of metaphors through analysis of narratives. An example of a balanced methodology, including similar critical approaches, would be Wedemeyer’s brief analysis of metaphors of impurity in the Buddhist tantras. He carefully uses critical and philological approaches to show that the antinomian elements in the Buddhist tantras reflect ‘concerns native to mainstream Indian religion’ (Wedemeyer 2007: 1). Cabezón (2000: 234–240) and Scherer (2006d: 75–76) combine critical and philological approaches in a balanced manner.

literature (which will make it impossible to analyse beyond the normative tradition), nor to disregard any substantial cultural, religious, and historical differences (which may lead to entirely adventurous readings). This thesis will thus not employ the extreme relativism that any reading might be valid.<sup>30</sup> The textual complexity and history are examined in detail. The genres and the religious experiences and interpretations expressed therein are related to the Karmapa's life and interpreted in light of Buddhist practice and culture in Tibet.<sup>31</sup>

Although this thesis aims at a close reading and an emic understanding, combined with a critical awareness, the researcher is aware of the limitations of any method and believes that any research is bound to be subjective to an extent. How texts are read, translated, and understood is coloured by the researcher's cultural background, ideas, and his or her methodology.<sup>32</sup> It is thus important to keep in mind that any of the writings about the Eighth Karmapa will always be a presentation belonging to our time and culture; one can only attempt to interpret how the texts were read by another culture in another age.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, when aiming at either empathic or objective understanding, reflexivity of the scholar, along with a clear statement of methodology and sources, is important.

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<sup>30</sup> Gombrich (1996: 7, 159). An example of a slightly adventurous reading is Bjerken (2005). He has drawn from Jonathan Z. Smith's theories of locative religion and ritual in order to study the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* in Tibet. Though his reading offers interesting ideas about methodology (ibid. 816–821), it largely remains theoretical speculation without much reference to sources apart from a translation of the tantra by Skorupski (1983). In his much more substantial *Buddhism and Deconstruction: Towards a Comparative Semiotics*, Wang (2001), according to O'Leary, sometimes reads postmodern ideas into the terms *samatā* and *dharmatā* of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra literature (ibid. 7, 152, and 167; see the review by O'Leary 2004). These attempts isolate certain passages as ontological statements, interpreting them with postmodern theories. Mills (2007: 3–5) critically discusses academic readings of the myth of the supine demoness for the founding of the first Tibetan temple. Orientalism in its 'classical' sense does not apply in the case of Tibet. For a certain kind of 'positive Orientalism' as often found in the reception of Tibet, see the references in this chapter, n. 5, and Dreyfus (2005b).

<sup>31</sup> Examples are Jackson, D. (1987), who has studied Buddhist scholarly debate in the *mKhas 'jug* of Sa skya Paṇḍita; and Stearns (1999), for his study of Dolpopa's *gzhan stong* theories. In the realm of Great Seal studies, the PhD dissertation of Sherpa (2004) on sGam po pa has similarities to the style of this research. In his *Three Vow Theories in Tibetan Buddhism*, Sobisch (2002a) presents differing standpoints over the centuries in both historical and doctrinal contexts. In *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Cuevas (2003) states that finally 'questions of historical contexts must always prevail' (ibid. 215).

<sup>32</sup> See for example Feyerabend (1980: 52–75), for the relativity of methods.

<sup>33</sup> See Kragh (1998: 9). Although I do not follow his approach in that texts should not be interpreted through biographical evidence.

A brief note on the collaboration with Tibetan scholars: although the Great Seal is primarily intended to be practised in meditation, this research is limited to exploring its specific textual witnesses. Through occasional consultation with Tibetan scholars the understanding will be further enhanced, especially in describing the reception and use of the texts today. For this, an empathic as well as critical approach was adopted.<sup>34</sup> Here, it should be remarked that, in the case of Tibetan Studies, the insider/outsider problem is often blurred: insiders can be critical and outsiders have shown to be methodologically naïve and vice versa.<sup>35</sup> Recently, some scholars have sought to abandon the insider/outsider dichotomy altogether for a view in which everyone is a co-participant in the formulation of a narrative about religion.<sup>36</sup>

In light of these discussions, it is clear that the research can never truly claim to show objectively ‘The Great Seal of the Eighth Karmapa’ as practised in medieval Tibet. It will nevertheless strive to understand and interpret the Great Seal of the Eighth Karmapa in its specific textual sources and contexts with the methods stated above, thus contributing to our knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, its history, and its practices.

### *1.3 Previous Research on the Life and Works of the Eighth Karmapa*

Although the Eighth Karmapa was a thought-provoking figure, important to the whole of medieval Tibetan Buddhism, previous scholarship on his life and works has been limited. No research has yet fully taken into account the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, published 2000–2004. Prior to this publication, scholars were forced to rely on Tibetan textual sources published during the 1960s and 70s.<sup>37</sup> But even with regards to this earlier material, only the surface has been scratched and some literature is inadequate in its treatment of the subject.

In terms of secondary literature on the Eighth Karmapa’s life, Gregor Verhufen (1995) provides the only academic study in his Master’s thesis ‘Die Biographien des Achten Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje und seines Lehrers Sangs rgyas mnyan pa’ [‘The Biographies of the Eighth Karmapa

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<sup>34</sup> In the collection *Buddhist Translations: Problems and Perspectives* edited by Doboorn (2001), leading scholars such as Ruegg (2001: 79–80) have emphasised the importance of collaboration with Tibetan scholars from the tradition for reading Tibetan texts.

<sup>35</sup> For severe criticisms of the Tibetan form of government, see Sobisch (2002b).

<sup>36</sup> Knott (2005: 245–246).

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter Three (at the end of 3.1).

and his Teacher Sangs rgyas mnyan pa']. Verhufen has focused mainly on the Karmapa's relationship to his most important teacher, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa (1445/1457–1510/1525). He rightly recognises Sangs rgyas mnyan pa as one of the most important influences on the Eighth Karmapa, and has carried out philological and historical research in order to document this crucial dynamic of the teacher-student relationship in Vajrayāna Buddhism.<sup>38</sup> He has then used the older *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (composed between 1545 and 1565) as the main source for translating episodes from the life of Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.<sup>39</sup>

With regard to the Eighth Karmapa's life, he has critically edited and translated the passage on the pre-birth and birth of the Eighth Karmapa, as found in Situ Paṅ chen's *Kaṃ tshang*, composed in 1715. He summarised the remainder of the Eighth Karmapa's life as documented in the same source.<sup>40</sup> This summary has served as a useful aid, as it allows a first overview on the basis of a Tibetan source. The annotations and appendices are especially helpful.<sup>41</sup> Aside from this, Verhufen has not drawn from the older *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, composed by one of the Eighth Karmapa's students, not to mention the spiritual biographies from the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, which were not available to him.<sup>42</sup>

Verhufen has correctly indicated the historical and scholastic importance of the Eighth Karmapa, and delineated the main phases of his development. However, while it is present in his sources, he basically overlooked the detail of there being two candidates for the title of Eighth

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<sup>38</sup> Verhufen (1995: 46) correctly remarks: 'Nur der eigene Lehrer, "der spirituelle Freund" (*Kalyāṇamitra*), weiß, welche Lehren für den Schüler (tib. *slob ma*) angemessen sind' (Only one's teacher, the spiritual friend (*Kalyāṇamitra*), knows which teachings are suitable for the student (Tib. *slob ma*)).

<sup>39</sup> Verhufen (1995: 53–75).

<sup>40</sup> The translation and Tibetan text are found in *ibid.* 75–80; the summary follows on pages 80–89.

<sup>41</sup> See the notes in *ibid.* 90–100 and, for example, note 93 on the relation to the Chinese emperor. Some referencing remains inadequate: though he mentions the Karmapa's place of passing away as Dwags po bshad grub gling, no exact page references are given (*ibid.* 88). The list of visions of the Eighth Karmapa along with indices to places and names in *Kaṃ tshang* (Verhufen 1995: 104–131) are a most welcome contribution and bear testimony to Verhufen's diligence in researching primary sources.

<sup>42</sup> Previously, two published Tibetan sources were available dealing with the Eighth Karmapa's life: dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (composed between 1545 and 1565 and published in 1961 and 1986) and the slightly shorter *History of the Karma bKa' brgyud pa Sect* composed by Si tu Paṅ chen and his student Belo in 1715 (published in 1968, 1972 and 1990). Verhufen uses only the latter for his academic study of the Eighth Karmapa's life (Verhufen 1995: 18, 75–103).

Karmapa. This research focuses on this issue as a significant factor in the Eighth Karmapa's development and advances knowledge by taking into account the newly available spiritual biography composed by A khu a khra.<sup>43</sup>

In the appendix, Verhufen lists the Karmapa's works as found in the *Shes bya'i gter mdzod* and adds useful geographical information in the index.<sup>44</sup> Verhufen's Master's thesis presents the most extensive scholarly treatment of the Eighth Karmapa's life; the fact that he did not draw from the older (available) *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* and that his contribution is largely descriptive is no shortcoming with regard to the aims of his study. Further, an MA thesis is only the beginning of research. This book attempts to advance research by further exploring the Eighth Karmapa's religious career and its historical contexts on the basis of significant early sources. Additionally, they are approached with different research foci: his becoming a scholar and his study and teaching of the Great Seal.

In 'The Karmapa Sect: A Historical Note', Hugh Richardson, one of the most renowned British Tibetologists, briefly mentions the Eighth Karmapa. Richardson focuses on his relation to the Chinese Emperor, Wu-tsung. To that end, he has appended a translation of a letter of invitation from the Chinese Emperor to the Eighth Karmapa; a rare document found at the Karmapa's main seat in Central Tibet, mTshur phu.<sup>45</sup> Though some of

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<sup>43</sup> Verhufen (1995: 31) introduces the Eighth Karmapa as an outstanding personality. In a footnote, he then quotes (ibid. 31 n. 51) the *Karmapa Papers* edited by Nesterenko (1992: 7), where the Tibetan scholar sTobs dga' Rin po che rightly mentions that there were two candidates for the title of Eighth Karmapa. Verhufen (ibid.) asserts that he has not found this story confirmed in any available spiritual biography known to him at the time. Reference to this fact, however, can be found in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, which Verhufen himself draws on heavily (Verhufen 1995: 53–72) and in his own work in a footnote to Stein (1972: 147) (ibid. 96, n. 59). *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* p. 1215: "At that time there was a Lama A mdo ba, with quite some capacity for stubbornness. With regard to his own son that was born, too, good dream signs appeared to the parents; and based on this [A mdo ba] made his son practice various teaching and trainings, and [the boy] became known as the magical emanation (*sprul sku*) of the Omniscient One; and they stayed in the encampment. Pleasing the encampment inhabitants (*sgar pa*) with food and beer (*chang*) [A mdo ba] made them partial (towards his son)." 'di'i dus bla ma a mdo ba rgod rlabs can zhig gis khong rang gi bu zhig byung ba la'ang pha ma la rmi ltas [p. 1216] bzang po byung ba la rten nas bu la bslab sbyang yang du ma byas nas thams cad mkhyen pa'i sprul skur grags te brag gsum na bzhugs/ *sgar pa phal cher yang chang gis mgu bar bgyis nas phyogs su lung bar byas/*. It is well documented in A khu A khra and other sources published later and used in this dissertation (Chapter Three (3.4) and Chapter Four (4.1.2, 4.1.3)).

<sup>44</sup> Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang (ed.), *Bod gangs can gyi grub mtha'*.

<sup>45</sup> Richardson (1980: 347–350) briefly discusses the Karmapa's invitation to China and its conflicting portrayal in Chinese dGe lugs and bKa' brgyud pa sources. This article was first

Richardson's assertions are a bit outdated, his account of Sino-Tibetan relations and his historical guesses are still remarkable and provide some contextual information for this research.<sup>46</sup>

There are two traditional accounts of the Eighth Karmapa's life published earlier. In *Black Hat Lama*, Nick Douglas and Meryl White (1976) write four pages on his life.<sup>47</sup> Their description is basic and lacking any references or critical investigation, though it evinces certain details.<sup>48</sup> It is embedded in a collection of spiritual biographies (*rnam thar*) in which the lives of all the Karmapas are presented in a traditional way. In spite of its brevity, this account is the first Western publication dealing with the Eighth Karmapa's life, and on the whole it offers useful insights into the incarnation lineage of the Karmapas.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, the reader finds a translation of a well-used meditation in the appendix: *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal 'byor* (*The Meditation on the Lama in Four Sessions*).<sup>50</sup> Both authors worked together with Tibetan scholar Karma 'phrin las pa (b. 1931) under the guidance of the Sixteenth Karmapa, Rang byung rig pa'i rdo rje (1923–1981).

In *The Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet*, Karma Thinley (Wylie: 'phrin las) (1980) uses similar Tibetan sources and summarises their content more extensively.<sup>51</sup> His work is written from a purely traditional perspective, seeking to inspire openness and trust in the Buddhist practitioner. The summary of the Eighth Karmapa's life is only four pages long and contains no citation of sources, though it is made clear from the appendix that they stem from the spiritual biography (*rnam thar*) and history of religion (*chos*

published in 1976; this thesis uses a reprint from 1980. The translation of the letter is located on pages 363–366, while the Tibetan text itself is on 375–376.

<sup>46</sup> He says, for example, that after a large Chinese party had tried to invite the Karmapa in 1521, he declined and 'the young lama was hurriedly moved to central Tibet' (ibid. 349). But according to the sources studied in this research the Eighth Karmapa only approached central Tibetan dBus in 1537 (*Kam tshang*, p. 339; see also Chapter Four (4.1.5, 4.1.6)). It is possible that Richardson has referred to Kong po or Dwags po as 'Central Tibet,' an imprecision which might explain his wording.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas and White (1976: 86–90).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 91, n. 52 at least remarks on the presence of the 'shorter instructions' (*khrid thung*); see also Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gDams khrid man ngag* (1976 edition).

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the introduction in Douglas and White (1976: 17–40).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 243–253. This text was later co-translated by the researcher from Tibetan to German (see Rheingans and Müller Witte (trans.) 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Thinley (1980: 89–96).



'byung) genres.<sup>52</sup> Thinley is a Tibetan scholar and meditation teacher from the bKa' brgyud and Sa skya traditions. In the introduction, Stott signals the Eighth Karmapa's importance. And Reginald R. Ray attests to the spiritual functions of the 'magic' and 'visionary' aspect of spiritual biographies: 'Magic is then, in Tibetan Buddhist Tradition, the handmaiden of enlightenment.'<sup>53</sup> However, Thinley's account lacks historical detail and critical analysis.

The above works represent all historical research carried out on the Eighth Karmapa's life.<sup>54</sup> Some have methodological weaknesses and omit important primary sources. The valuable spiritual biographies from the recently published *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* were not available to them. Furthermore, they contain minor errors: Thinley claims the Eighth Karmapa was founder or inspiration for a tradition of Tibetan painting style typical of many later bKa' brgyud painted-scrolls, known as karma encampment style (*karma sgar 'bris*). It is not clear from which sources they make this assertion, but David Jackson has shown convincingly that in fact the Ninth Karmapa's student, Nam mkha' bkra shis, was responsible for the style.<sup>55</sup>

As will be shown below, academic literature on the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal is inadequate. Research explicitly discussing the theory and practice of his Great Seal is virtually non-existent, and no one has dealt with the shorter meditation instructions published in 1976, or the various question and answer texts and advices found in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.<sup>56</sup> The few academic studies which take his Great Seal into account are mainly based on the Karmapa's *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* (*Chariot of the Siddhas of the Dwags po Lineage*), a commentary on the

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<sup>52</sup> He summarises them only briefly. His sources are: dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba, *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*; Si tu Paṅ chen and 'Be lo, *Kam tshang*; Padma dkar po, *Tibetan Chronicle*; Nges don bstan rgyas, *Karma pa sku 'phreng gyi nam thar*; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, and the modern continuation of Situ's work sTobs dga' rin po che's *bKa' brgyud gser phreng*. For a further description and analysis of the Tibetan sources, see Chapter Three.

<sup>53</sup> Thinley (1980: 18); for Ray's introduction, see *ibid.* 1–19; for Stott's remark, see *ibid.* 29).

<sup>54</sup> There are a few studies on Buddhist masters, such as Kramer (1999), Ehrhard (2002a and 2002b), Rheingans (2004), and Caumanns (2006) which provide information regarding the religio-historical context.

<sup>55</sup> Thinley (1980: 94): '... and inspired the Karma Gadri movement in art through his work in the field.' See also the dust cover of Brunnhölzl (2004). What Thinley perhaps meant, was the traditional assertion that Nam mkha' bkra shis was an emanation of the Eighth Karmapa (Jackson, D. 1996: 169–176 and 178, n. 360).

<sup>56</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gDams khrid man ngag* (1976 edition).

*Madhyamakāvatāra* of Candrakīrti.<sup>57</sup> This review therefore covers research about the Eighth Karmapa's writings in a broader sense.

In *The Great Perfection*, Samten G. Karmay (1988) uses Tibetan sources authored by the Eighth Karmapa for the first time, drawing on the *rNal 'byor rgyud kyi nam bshad* published in 1979.<sup>58</sup> With the aid of these texts he briefly presents the Eighth Karmapa's polemics against the rNying ma pa: the Karmapa took issue with the concepts of the pure basis (*ka dag*), the all base (*kun gzhi*), and the all base consciousness (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*, Tib. *kun gzhi nam shes*).<sup>59</sup> Though Karmay does not attempt to present the Great Seal of the Karmapa, which is not the purpose of his masterful presentation of the rDzogs chen system, his work must be credited for first employing the primary sources of the Eighth Karmapa and presenting his doctrinal critiques of the rNying ma along with the subsequent replies of Sog ldog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624). Though this thesis is not concerned with these debates, Karmay provides important background information.

Paul Williams (1983a, 1983b) and David Seyfort Ruegg (1988) have dealt with the Eighth Karmapa's view on Madhyamaka. In 'A Note on Some Aspects of Mi bskyod rdo rje's Critique of dGe lugs pa Madhyamaka', Williams (1983a) describes the Karmapa's philosophical discussion with Tsong kha pa, founder of the dGe lugs school of Tibetan Buddhism. He presents as the Karmapa's central argument the view that teachings on Madhyamaka, or even the Great Seal, should be an antidote to suffering.<sup>60</sup>

Williams also judges Mi bskyod rdo rje's comments as notable for their impatient style, maintaining that the Karmapa only comments on 'classical' dGe lugs pa texts such as the *Madhyamakāvatāra* in order to refute their 'sophisticated interpretations' on their own grounds.<sup>61</sup> Finally, he suggests further contextualisation of the Karmapa's philosophical views. While

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<sup>57</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.

<sup>58</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGyal dbang karma pa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnal 'byor rgyud kyi nam bshad*. The four texts from this collection Karmay employed are: *rJe ye bzang rtse ba'i rgyud gsum gsang ba* (ibid. pp. 149–255), *Rang la nges pa'i tshad ma zhes pa'i 'grel ba gnas lugs bdud rtsi' snying khu* (ibid. pp. 337–404), *Yid la mi byed pa'i zur khra* (ibid. pp. 409–417), and *Hva shangs dang 'dres pa'i don 'dzug gtugs su bstan pa* (ibid. pp. 419–436). The last three are significant shorter commentaries on the Great Seal which will also, in part, be used in this dissertation.

<sup>59</sup> Karmay (1988: 180 n. 34, 181–182, 188, 195, 230).

<sup>60</sup> Williams (1983a: 129).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 128.

Williams has contributed to the discussion between the Karmapa and the dGe lugs pa, and makes a few interesting points regarding the Karmapa's character, he has based his assertions on a single source alone: the Madhyamaka commentary, *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.<sup>62</sup> This thesis wishes to remedy this slightly limited portrayal.

Williams (1983b) uses the same commentary for a short paper, where he briefly mentions the Eighth Karmapa's critique of Go bo Rab 'byams pa bSod nams seng ge (1429–1489) with regard to the so-called 'self-awareness' (*rang rig*).<sup>63</sup>

Ruegg (1988) *et passim* explores the same commentary on Madhyamaka by the Eighth Karmapa. He introduces the concept of genealogy or lineage and subsequently translates and paraphrases the introduction (*spyi don*, lit. 'general meaning') of this work and demonstrates that, according to the Karmapa, Maitrīpa is of great importance for bKa' brgyud pa as he was the master of the Great Seal. Ruegg suggests that the Karmapa wrote his commentary in reply to the dGe lugs pa scholar Se ra rJe btsun (1469–1544). And further remarks that the Karmapa 'changed' from the *gzhan stong* ('empty of other') interpretation of Madhyamaka to the *rang stong* ('empty of itself') view over the course of his life, a view that is briefly questioned and enhanced in this research.<sup>64</sup> Ruegg's article can be seen as a valuable starting point for researching the Great Seal of the Eighth Karmapa, as it makes important passages accessible that discuss his distinctions of non-mentation (*amanasikāra*) Madhyamaka, which is quasi-synonymous with Great Seal.<sup>65</sup>

Donald S. Lopez (1996) briefly mentions the polemical answers of Se ra rJe btsun to those who criticise Tsong kha pa's position of Madhyamaka, among them the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>66</sup> Cyrus Stearns (1999) uses the Eighth Karmapa's brief analysis *gZhan stong legs par smra ba'i sgron me* for his account of the *gzhan stong* traditions in Tibet.

In *The Center of the Sunlit Sky*, Karl Brunnhölzl (2004) examines the Madhyamaka interpretation of the bKa' brgyud pa. The work is a thoroughly researched contribution grounded on a range of primary

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<sup>62</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.

<sup>63</sup> Williams (1983b: 243–245).

<sup>64</sup> Ruegg (1988: 1275). On the same page he comments: 'Mi bskyod rdo rje's approach may then well represent his response to the criticism of his earlier work by Chos kyi rgyal mthsan in his *kLu grub dgoñs rgyan*.'

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 1248–1252.

<sup>66</sup> Lopez (1996: 218, 221).

sources. It is not, however, intended as an academic publication and thus exhibits a dearth of historical, cultural, and literary contextualisation. In the course of examining the Madhyamaka of the bKa' brgyud pa, scattered remarks are found regarding the Karmapa's Great Seal interpretation. Brunnhölzl again uses sources authored by the Karmapa, dealing centrally with Madhyamaka.<sup>67</sup> To this end, Brunnhölzl's contribution offers useful information: he summarises the introduction (*spyi don*) of *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, which outlines the Eighth Karmapa's view on the Great Seal in connection with Madhyamaka. With the aid of further sources, he also attempts to reconcile Tibetan disputes on *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* in light of Indian sources, using the Karmapa's comments to underline his claims. Similar to Williams (1983a) and Ruegg (1988), he discusses the differences in the views of the Madhyamaka of Tsong kha pa and that of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>68</sup>

Unlike Williams (1983a) and Ruegg (1988), Brunnhölzl points to internal spiritual reasons as a possible motivation for the philosophical debates: the 'search for truth' and the establishing of the proper view that disallows ethical misconduct. He assumes that when the Karmapa and Tsong kha pa dispute, they do so 'based on great compassion in order to assist others in their own quest for liberation'.<sup>69</sup> He goes on to argue that the masters had their reasons for expressing inexpressible truth in different ways: the capacities and inclinations of their students. Thus, he believes that the refutations and debates of Tibetan scholars 'are not to be seen as personal attacks but as means to sharpen our wisdom'.<sup>70</sup> This stand reflects his and his audience's perspectives as Buddhist practitioners. In general, he considers Madhyamaka not to be a philosophical system, but a means to eliminate suffering and bring about liberation.<sup>71</sup> Some of these ideas will be investigated in the analysis of the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal in Chapter Six. Brunnhölzl's treatment of some specific doctrinal developments in Madhyamaka of the Eighth Karmapa is more or less complete; however, he

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<sup>67</sup> Brunnhölzl, like Ruegg (1988) and Williams (1983a), mainly uses the introduction to *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* when expounding on Madhyamaka in Tibet and in the bKa' brgyud tradition. He also uses the *gZhan stong legs par smra ba'i sgron me* and the Eighth Karmapa's commentary to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa*).

<sup>68</sup> Brunnhölzl (2004: 553–597).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 553.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 554.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 157–160.

neither focuses exclusively on the Great Seal teaching and practice of the Karmapa, nor takes other sources into consideration.

A volume that appeared after this book had been submitted to the publisher is *Mahāmudrā and the Middle Way: Post-Classical Kagyü Discourses on Mind, Emptiness and Buddha-Nature* (2016) by Martina Draszczyk and David Higgins. It discusses four Tibetan scholars' views of the Great Seal, whom the authors term 'post-classical': Karma 'phrin las pa (1456–1539), Śākya mchog ldan (1423–1507), Mi bskyod rdo rje, and Padma dkar po (1527–1592). After an introductory overview, one chapter is devoted to each master; the second volume contains editions and translations of key Tibetan texts.<sup>72</sup> Draszczyk and Higgins had employed this very book about the Eighth Karmapa in its prior thesis version (as 'unpublished thesis', it was available via the British Library, London), using it for presenting the historical context of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>73</sup> They also further worked on and translated texts about the Great Seal that were already discussed in the thesis-version of this book, such as, for example the *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*.<sup>74</sup> At times, no reference is made to the prior-thesis version.<sup>75</sup> On the whole, this most welcome contribution sheds more light on the Middle Way related discourses of key Great Seal masters of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and is very useful for understanding the more doctrinally oriented discussions.

In *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within* (2008), Klaus-Diether Mathes draws upon the Eighth Karmapa's *Abhisamayālamkāra* commentary, demonstrating that his *gzhan stong* resembles that of the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), in his summary of the Buddhist tantras, the *Zab mo nang gi don*.<sup>76</sup> Additional mention of the Eighth Karmapa, limited to a few lines or a footnote, can be found in Kapstein (1989), Martin

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<sup>72</sup> These include the following works by Mi bskyod rdo rje: *rGan po'i rlung sman* (excerpts), *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*, *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* (excerpt), *dGongs gcig 'grel pa VI* (excerpt) (Draszczyk and Higgins 2016, vol. 2: 104–153).

<sup>73</sup> Draszczyk and Higgins 2016: 20–21.

<sup>74</sup> Chapter Three (thesis version 2008: 72 and 72, n. 57) points out textual sources about the Great Seal ascribed to the Eighth Karmapa. The *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis* is paraphrased in Chapter Six (thesis version 2008: 211–213).

<sup>75</sup> There are some points with regard to the usage of my 2004 Master's thesis in their study of Karma 'phrin las pa that I will discuss in my forthcoming book about Karma 'phrin las pa.

<sup>76</sup> Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within: Gö Lotsāwa's Mahāmudrā Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga* (2008). This information was obtained directly from the author, K.D. Mathes (oral communication, August 2006, Hamburg). Mathes (2006: 11) occasionally mentions the Eighth Karmapa.

(1997), Jackson, D. (1994), Schaeffer (1998), Ruegg (2000), Braitstein (2004), and Phuntsho (2005).<sup>77</sup>

A very small number of the Eighth Karmapa's writings have been translated, often in non-scholarly publications. In his *Four Songs to Je Rinpoche*, Glenn Mullin translates the Karmapa's praise of the dGe lugs pa founder Tsong kha pa.<sup>78</sup>

Two translations by the Nālandā Translation Committee discuss the Eighth Karmapa. In 1980, a collection of Tibetan poetry (*mgur*) was published in translation with the title *The Rain of Wisdom*. It contains the translation of a collection entitled *Ocean of bKa' brgyud Songs (bKa' brgyud mgur mtsho)* originally assembled by the Eighth Karmapa and later expanded by other Tibetan meditators. The collection contains the quintessential poetical instructions of thirty-five bKa' brgyud poets, some authored by the Eighth Karmapa. Besides the limited scope of texts by the Eighth Karmapa, Kapstein has already pointed out infelicities in the translation together with a lack of contextualisation of the genre of Tibetan poetry.<sup>79</sup>

The Nālandā Translation Committee published 'Daily Prayers' in the collection *Religions of Tibet in Practice* (1997) as part of the Princeton Readings in Religion Series. The text contains a short translation of an invocation entitled 'Fulfilling the Aspirations of Gyalwang Karmapa'. In this invocation, two short passages are ascribed to Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje.<sup>80</sup> However, neither the author nor the origin of the translation can be verified, since no Tibetan source is mentioned.

The Nitartha Institute has translated the sixth chapter of the *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.<sup>81</sup> This work can serve as a valuable aid in understanding this particular Madhyamaka text but neglects historical and

<sup>77</sup> Kapstein (1989: 230), Martin (1992: 185), Jackson, D. (1994: 73–83), Schaeffer (1998: 857), Ruegg (2000: 6, 26, 62), Braitstein (2004: 10), and Phuntsho (2005: 44, 114, 120, 238–239, 243, 245, 247, 257).

<sup>78</sup> Mullin (1978: 37–40). The text is found as one among five praises to various masters in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa: Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, Gangs can phyis byon pa'i mkhas pa chen po bstan bcos rgyas par mdzad pa'i dam pa lnga la bstod pa*.

<sup>79</sup> Kapstein (1983: 79).

<sup>80</sup> Nālandā (1997: 408–409). Verses one and three seem to resemble those from the famed *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal 'byor (Guru Yoga in Four Sessions)* (see Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal 'byor*, p. 275/fol. 3a). The dedication could be the translation of an often used formula from the preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) dBang phyug rdo rje Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i phreng ba*, p. 119).

<sup>81</sup> Mikyö Dorje (2006) was translated by Jules Levinson and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso.

religious contexts. It does, for example, not mention the birth date of the Karmapa. While collaboration with a learned Tibetan scholar was sought in this work, it has value as a translated text.<sup>82</sup> In a collection of selected practice instructions titled *Straight from the Heart*, Karl Brunnhölzl (2007) includes a translation of the Eighth Karmapa's comment on a song of Milarepa.<sup>83</sup>

Finally, a brief note on the research about the Great Seal as such.<sup>84</sup> While some translations and transcribed teachings are available, academic work is scarce, this includes both scholarly apparatus and historically grounded attempts to come to terms with the textual and terminological complexities on the bKa' brgyud Great Seal.<sup>85</sup> Though valuable research has been and is carried out on the late Indian and early Tibetan Great Seal, the textual material of teachers such as Marpa, Zhang, and Phag mo gru pa demands more attention, not to mention the manifold proponents of the various later schools such as the 'Bri gung and Karma bKa' brgyud.<sup>86</sup> With

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<sup>82</sup> This review does not wish to denigrate the value of such works *per se*; accurate translation is an arduous task and welcome contribution. But the lack of a critical apparatus and proper contextualisation impedes scholarly use of such isolated texts in translation (see also Sobisch 2002a: 5–8).

<sup>83</sup> Brunnhölzl (2007) has translated Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun mi las rje sgam po pa gdams pa mgyur 'grel*. For such translations, see previous note.

<sup>84</sup> The literature on the Great Seal as such is not reviewed extensively. The relevant literature is treated in Chapter Two and Chapter Six.

<sup>85</sup> Jackson, R. (2001: 2). Guenther has pioneered in academic studies of the Great Seal through his research on Nāropa and Saraha (1969, 1986, 1993). While Ruegg (1989) has concentrated more broadly on sudden and gradual approaches to enlightenment and the Great Seal, Broido (1984, 1985, 1987) has focused his research on the sixteenth-century contemporary of the Eighth Karmapa, 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (1527–1592). Tiso and Torricelli (1991) have critically studied the *Mahāmudropadeśa* ascribed to Tilopa. For the Karma bKa' brgyud Great Seal, see the very good translations of Tashi Namgyal's manuals (Namgyal 1986 translated by Lhalungpa, and Namgyal 2001 translated by Pema Kunsang) and translations of the extensive guidebooks by Karmapa IX dBang phyug rdo rje (1989, 1992 and 2001). See also the few shorter works on the Great Seal masters such as Evans-Wentz (1958), Gyaltsen (1983), Kongtrul (1992), bsTan pa'i nyin byed (1994), the manuals of the famed Karma Chagme (1997), and Rangdröl (1989).

<sup>86</sup> In recent works, Schaeffer (2000) and Braitstein (2004) have focused on the Great Seal of the Indian *siddha* Saraha. In *Tantric Treasures*, Roger Jackson (2004) has translated and annotated important Apabhramśa-language spiritual songs (*dohā*) of Saraha, Kāṇha, and Tilopa. Mathes (2006, 2007, 2011) has begun breaking new ground in exploring Indian sources (texts in Sanskrit and Tibetan translation) of the non-tantric Great Seal. He also (2005, 2008) focused on the reception of *tathāgatatagarbha* doctrines and Great Seal theories and apologetics by the famous historian 'Gos Lo tsā ba (1392–1481). Sherpa (2004) has focused on both life and doctrine of sGam po pa. Kragh (1998: 128) focused on sGam po pa and is conducting research heavily based on the writings attributed to him (*Dwags po'i bka'*

regard to the period of the Eighth Karmapa, Kapstein has briefly noted that a certain systematisation of bKa' brgyud Great Seal manuals can be observed in the late sixteenth century.<sup>87</sup>

As many concepts and doctrinal developments have not yet been fully grasped, the research has concentrated on the task of analysing its concepts and doctrinal developments.<sup>88</sup> Yet, already David Jackson has noted: 'The Great Seal and similar teachings by their nature do not lend themselves easily to discursive description and historical analyses.'<sup>89</sup> And Mathes has briefly mentioned that also much earlier Great Seal material was based on question and answer texts. Though sources of this textual genre have served as a basis for various academic studies, an examination of why so many significant sources are question and answer texts constitutes somewhat of a lacuna.<sup>90</sup>

On the whole, secondary literature, both on the life and the Great Seal instructions of the Eighth Karmapa, is limited. The lack of historical studies of his life necessitates covering this area from the ground up. His ideas on Madhyamaka and his relationship to Tsong kha pa have been partially explored. In the course of this some Great Seal theory was presented.<sup>91</sup> Whilst Karmay (1988) has identified a few valuable sources, no currently extant

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'bum). Schiller, on the basis of his excellent Master's thesis has researched the system of the 'four yogas' (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) of the Great Seal. *Die "Vier Yoga"-Stufen der Mahāmudrā-Meditationstradition* (Dept. of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> See Kapstein (2006a: 58–60), for the systematisation of the siddha's teachings in Tibet. See Sobisch (2003a), for the meditation manuals (*khrid yig*) of the five-fold Great Seal of the 'Bri gung pa. Sobisch (ibid. 2, n. 4) briefly mentions the Eighth Karmapa's *lNga ldan tsogs su bsgom pa'i cho ga*, pointing to the Eighth Karmapa's contribution to 'Bri gung pa doctrine.

<sup>88</sup> Jackson, D. (1994) attempts to clarify the understanding of Sa skya Paṇḍita's critique (ibid. 2–8) with a rich range of sources and is mainly concerned with the Great Seal debates. He has hinted at possible developments of the Great Seal in the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition: namely, that the figure of Maitrīpa and his Great Seal were particularly emphasised from the sixteenth century onwards and that the Eighth Karmapa contributed to this development (ibid. 82–84). These useful remarks are briefly taken up in Chapter Six (6.4). Also Kragh (1998: 41–62) is very much concerned with doctrinal issues. His work contains a portrayal of sGam po pa's Great Seal (ibid. 29–41) which aids the context of this thesis.

<sup>89</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 7).

<sup>90</sup> Mathes (2011: 96) has mentioned in passing that each of the twenty-five *amanasikāra* works was Maitrīpa's reply to a different question. Questions and answers figure prominently among the early sources on the Great Seal of sGam po pa, such as the famed *Phag mo gru pa'i zhus lan* (*Answers to Questions by Phag mo gru pa*) (see Kragh 1998: 18–20; Jackson, D. 1994: 14–28; Martin 1984: 245; Sherpa 2004: 97–125).

<sup>91</sup> Especially Ruegg (1988) and Brunnhölzl (2004).



body of research explicitly explores the various Great Seal instructions of the Eighth Karmapa or his question and answer texts in detail. This research takes into account a new range of sources (the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* together with some additional rare texts), clarifies basic facts about the Eighth Karmapa's life, and emphasises selected Great Seal teachings across textual genres which condense and convey religious meaning.

#### *1.4 Plan of this Book*

Chapter One presented the main argument and related research questions. It explained the methodologies applied and discusses the relevance of previous research. Chapter Two introduces the doctrinal and historical contexts through the Great Seal distinctions of Kong sprul (1813–1899), and explains key points of the bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal and sGam po pa. It outlines the Great Seal critique of Sa skya Paṇḍita, which became the subject of many medieval bKa' brgyud pa apologetics and explains the tense religio-political conditions the Eighth Karmapa was confronted with.

Chapter Three critically evaluates the main textual sources and genres employed. Through discussing the history and transmission of the Karmapa's writings and the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, it lays a solid foundation for academic research. It briefly surveys the main sources for the Great Seal analysis: question and answer texts (*dris lan*), meditation instructions (*khrid*), esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), and advices (*bslab bya*). It also discusses the earliest spiritual biographies and spiritual memoirs most suitable for an analysis of the Eighth Karmapa's life.

Chapter Four examines how the Eighth Karmapa became one of the most prominent scholars and mystical teachers of his tradition. It explores how a rival candidate for the title of Karmapa, and the problematic religio-political situation resulting, may have reinforced his intellectual development. It examines his education in both scholastic and mystic teachings, and portrays his involvement and scepticism of contemporary worldly activities. Finally, it outlines his Great Seal instructions within his overall programme of meditation teaching that stressed Atiśa's graded path.

Chapter Five investigates concrete teaching situations through three case studies: dialogues embedded in the spiritual biography by A khu a khra, the *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan* (*Answer to a Question Asked by Gling drung pa La 'dor ba*) and the *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin* (*Identification of the Blessing of the Great Seal*). It illustrates key points and

divergent expressions of the Great Seal and how these were taught, depending on different circumstances and contexts.

Chapter Six further examines the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal instructions in a broader context; taking into account passages from additional meditation instructions and question and answer texts. It isolates the doctrine of understanding conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* as the key element, but concludes that a definitive Great Seal categorisation of the Eighth Karmapa is difficult to locate in the examined material. The chapter establishes the guru as the common origin, means, and unifying spiritual element of Great Seal practices of any approach, suggesting that an essential instruction is, according to circumstance, taught via either tantric or non-tantric means.

Chapter Seven concludes by advocating Great Seal instructions as pedagogical devices in which categorisation is subordinated to experience and realisation. It suggests that studies of Buddhism, especially Buddhist mysticism, can only benefit from careful awareness of contexts, such as genre and history. It indicates specific textual sources and meaningful areas for potential future research.

## Chapter 2

### The Great Seal and 15th to 16th Century Tibet

#### 2.1 *The Great Seal*

The Marpa bKa' brgyud and later Dwags po bKa' brgyud (the lineages which passed through sGam po pa) are meditative traditions whose essential practices comprise the Great Seal and the six doctrines of Nāropa.<sup>1</sup> In the course of this thesis the term 'Great Seal', if not otherwise specified, refers to this central instruction of the bKa' brgyud pa schools, which has been interpreted in different ways.<sup>2</sup>

The word 'bKa' brgyud' means: 'transmitted precept' or 'succession of precepts' and relates principally to any teaching passed on from teacher to student.<sup>3</sup> In Tibet, there exist two transmissions that came to be known by the name 'bKa' brgyud': the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud and the Marpa bKa' brgyud which were passed through Marpa Lo tsā ba (c.1000–c.1081).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mathes (2007: 1).

<sup>2</sup> A word definition by Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) reads: 'Because when experientially cultivating that to which one has been introduced through the esoteric directions of the guru, neither knowledge nor knowables surpass its radiance, it is a "seal" and because, besides that, there is no other gnosis of the Buddha to be sought out, it is "great"' (trans. Kapstein 2006a: 54, n. 20).

<sup>3</sup> There is further the name variation, *dkar brgyud*, where the word 'white' (*dkar*) refers to the white meditation garment worn by meditators (Smith 2001: 40; see also Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, *Thu'u bkwan grub mtha'*, p. 122). The naming of the bKa' brgyud tradition is discussed in Schiller (2002: 15-18) as well as in Smith (2001: 39-51). For the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud see Kapstein (1980) and Smith (2001: 53-58). Kapstein (2007: 116) uses the translation 'succession of precepts' for bKa' brgyud pa.

<sup>4</sup> See the following section on the details of this distinction. There are various opinions concerning Marpa's years of living (Stearns 2001: 171, n. 5). For biographies in European languages, see Bacot (1937) and Tsang Nyön Heruka (=gTsang smyon He ru ka) (1995); for a critical review of the 1995 translation, see Martin (1984). Sernesi (2004: 3–12) has argued on the basis of Mi la ras pa's 'Six Secret Songs' that some essential instructions were not

Marpa is said to have received two main transmissions of Great Seal practice: the Great Seal in combination with yogic exercise, from Nāropa, and the Great Seal of Maitrīpa, later considered to be one source of sGam po pa's interpretations.<sup>5</sup> The connection to the teacher is particularly significant in the meditative traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, and all masters equally emphasise the importance of a teacher for attaining realisation.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1.1 The bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal: A Brief Overview

Great Seal interpretations and categorisations differ even among the bKa' brgyud pa schools and its categorisation became a point of continued debate.<sup>7</sup> A brief presentation of a later bKa' brgyud master, Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899), may aid an initial survey: he distinguished a generally accepted mantra Great Seal, a sūtra Great Seal, and an essence Great Seal.<sup>8</sup>

Mantra Great Seal involves receiving tantric empowerment from one's guru (the Great Seal being often equated with the fourth empowerment of the \**niruttara-tantras*) and subsequent training in the two stages of meditation.<sup>9</sup> During the 'completion stage' (*rdzogs rim*), the Great Seal is practised in connection with the six doctrines of Nāropa as 'the way of means' (Skt. *upāyamārga*, Tib. *thabs lam*). Through exploitation of yogic energies and the experience of 'great bliss' (Skt. *mahāsukha*, Tib. *bde ba chen po*) the meditator experiences the 'innate ultimate wisdom of bliss and emptiness' (*bde stong lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*), recognising the luminous nature of mind (*sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba*). In the tantras a set of four

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passed via sGam po pa but Mi la ras pa's student Ras chung rDo rje grags (1083–1161). For the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud, see Kapstein (1980).

<sup>5</sup> Which teachings Tilopa received and from which masters is presented varyingly in Tibetan sources. The topic is analysed and well summarised in the article by Torricelli (1993) and in Marpa Chos kyi blo gros (1995: 66, n. 18). See Torricelli (1993: 197f.). For the Tibetan text see Marpa Chos kyi blo gros (1995: 7); for the translation, see *ibid.* 34–35.

<sup>6</sup> Powers (1997: 271). For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter Six (6.5).

<sup>7</sup> The most essential works in the Tibetan language are contained in the *Phyag chen mdzod*, as well as in Kong sprul's *rGya chen bka' mdzod* and *gDams ngag mdzod*, vols. 5–7. The history of the Great Seal is recounted in the famed *Deb ther sngon po* (*Blue Annals*) translated by Roerich (1996: 839–867).

<sup>8</sup> Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya mdzod*, vol. 3, p. 357; see also Mathes (2007: 545).

<sup>9</sup> The fourth empowerment, though accepted by the Tibetan tradition, seems to have a fairly thin standing in Indian sources. Isaacson (2000: 41f.) assumes at the present state of research, that the existence of the fourth empowerment originates from a single cryptic *pāda* of the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* or *Samājottara: caturthaṃ tat punas tathā*.

*mudrā* is mentioned in varying order, often associated with the four empowerments. In some systems, the *karmamudrā* (the actual or imagined consort) brings forth the ‘exemplary wisdom’ (*dpe’i ye shes*) of the third empowerment, which in turn leads to the ‘final ultimate awareness’ (*don gyi ye shes*) of the fourth empowerment: this is the *mahāmudrā*.<sup>10</sup>

Sūtra Great Seal is defined by its connection to the *pāramitāyāna*, being in accord with tantra, and focusing on the pith instruction of not becoming mentally engaged (*amanasikāra*) on the basis of sūtra teachings and practices (such as *śamathā* and *vipaśyanā* meditations). This definition is often quoted by Tibetan teachers and stems from the *Tattvadaśakaṭikā*.<sup>11</sup> While sGam po pa is credited with having taught a form of the Great Seal based on the sūtras, the term ‘sūtra Great Seal’ (*mdo lugs phyag chen*) first surfaced in Tibet during the nineteenth century. According to sGam po pa, it was the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (sometimes called the *Uttaratantraśāstra*) which was deemed vitally important by the bKa’ brgyud pa exegetes for understanding Great Seal theory and practice.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A frequently taught order would be: *dharmamudrā*, *amayamudrā* *karmamudrā*, and *mahāmudrā* (Namgyal 1986: 101; for the term ‘Great Seal’, see *ibid.* 92–105 and bKra shis rnam rgyal, *Phyag rgya chen po’i khrid yig chen mo*, pp. 163–168). There are numerous interpretations and systematisations of this complex tantric topic which cannot be explained here in detail. At times, the Great Seal (*mahāmudrā*) is the third (the fourth being the *amayamudrā*) or the fourth *mudrā* (see also Mathes 2011: 107–113, who investigated Maitrīpa’s *Sekanirdeśa* and *Caturmudropadeśa*; see Gray 2007b: esp. 703–707 and Bentor 2000: 339, for the four empowerments and four *mudrā*). For the phenomenon of tantra in general, see White (2000: 3–38; 2003 and 2005) and Sanderson (1988). For an overview of the Buddhist tantras and Vajrayāna, see Snellgrove (1987), Sanderson (1994), and Isaacson (2000). For the Tibetan organisation of the tantras, see Wedemeyer (2001) and Dalton (2005). For interpretations of the tantras, see Wedemeyer (2007). Davidson (2002) argues for socio-historical interpretations for the rise of tantra in India. Isaacson (2000: 25) explains how vast and multi-faceted a field Indian Buddhist tantra is, and warns against premature conclusions as to its nature.

<sup>11</sup> See Mathes (2006: 225). This refers to Jñānakīrti’s works as summarised by ‘Gos Lo tsā ba in his *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary, *Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos kyi ’grel bshad*. See also gZhon nu dpal, ‘Gos Lo tsā ba, *Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos*, 3 (ed. Mathes 2003).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, p. 400 (Roerich 1996: 459–460). The *Ratnagotravibhāga* is one of the rare Indian commentaries on the *tathāgatagarbhasūtras*. It teaches that the element (*dhātu*) in the state still covered by superficial defilements (*mala*) is called ‘Buddha nature’ or ‘impure suchness’ (*samālā tathatā*), and the state where the defilements are removed is called ‘Buddha’ or ‘pure thusness’ (*nirmalā tathatā*) (Zimmermann 2002: 50–65). Though a relatively small movement in India, it became more popular in Central and East Asian Buddhism (*ibid.* 67–90). For two brief articles on its reception in Tibet, which is linked to the interpretation of *gzhan stong*, see Burchardi (2000 and 2007).

Essence Great Seal constitutes the sudden realisation of one's 'natural mind' (*tha mal gyi shes pa*), which is the perfection inherent (Skt. *sahaja*, Tib. *lhan cig skye pa*) in any experience: after being pointed out (*ngo sprod*) by a qualified teacher, a practitioner of high capacity experiences the essence of mind directly. These teachings are often linked to the *dohā* literature of Saraha and the teaching-cycles attributed to Maitrīpa.<sup>13</sup>

Karma bKra shis chos 'phel, a nineteenth-century-born student of Kong sprul, conducted a similar analysis of the Great Seal in his *dkar chag* to the collection of Indian Great Seal texts.<sup>14</sup> Mathes has shown that bKra shis chos 'phel considers the Great Seal as such (synonymous here with essence Great Seal) a direct and quick path for those of highest capacity, dependent on neither the sūtras nor the tantras. However, it can be combined with the sūtra or tantra methods in order to be suitable for many. These were the two approaches Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas designated 'sūtra Great Seal' and 'mantra Great Seal'.<sup>15</sup>

The progressive stages of meditative development in the Great Seal are portrayed by the bKa' brgyud masters on the basis of the 'four trainings' (*rnal 'byor bzhi*): 'one-pointedness' (*rtse gcig*), 'free from concepts' (*spros bral*), 'one taste' (*ro gcig*), and 'non-meditation' (*sgom med*).<sup>16</sup> The Great Seal is often further distinguished into basis, path, and fruition. Rang byung rdo rje summarises in his *Phyag chen smon lam* (*Great Seal Wishes*) which remain significant until today:

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<sup>13</sup> Mathes (2011: 107). See also the following section 'sGam po pa, Early bKa' brgyud pa and the First Karmapa.'

<sup>14</sup> The collection of Indian works on the Great Seal, *rGya gzhung*, was assembled by the Seventh Karmapa and later edited by the Zhwa dmar Mi pham Chos kyi blo gros (*Phyag chen mdzod*), who added works by later proponents of the Great Seal.

<sup>15</sup> Mathes (2011: 10) used Karma bKra shis chos 'phel's *gNas lugs phyag rgya chen po'i rgya gzhung*.

<sup>16</sup> The extensive clarification of the four stages is attributed to sGam po pa (Namgyal 1986: 357f., 373; Martin 1992: 250–252; Kragh 1998: 19–20). In his manuals, dBang phyug rdo rje elucidates the correspondence between these four stages and the five paths and ten stages (*lam lnga, sa bcu*) of the Mahāyāna (dBang phyug rdo rje 1990: vol. 2; dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX, *Lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi zab khrid*). According to Schiller (2015), this system seems to be a later Tibetan development.

On the basis of purification, the mind itself, its unity of emptiness and clarity; through the means of purification, the Great Seal, the great diamond practice; may the fruit of purification, perfectly pure dharmakāya become manifest, free from the things to be purified, the incidental impurities of delusion!<sup>17</sup>

Karma 'phrin las pa outlines view, meditation, action, and result of the Great Seal:

To observe mind itself is the highest view. Not to be distracted from it is the highest meditation. Effortless action is the highest action. The simultaneous<sup>18</sup> three *buddhakāya* in its basis, when manifest, are the highest result!<sup>19</sup>

### 2.1.2 *sGam po pa, Early bKa' brgyud pa, and the First Karmapa*

The monk sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen (1079–1173), or, more specifically, the writings attributed to him, are crucial for studying any of Tibet's bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal traditions. He is credited with having united the two streams of the more monastic bKa' gdams pa with Marpa and Mi la ras pa's tantric bKa' brgyud pa, transmitted in lay communities.<sup>20</sup>

The research conducted so far allows for the (albeit preliminary) conclusion that sGam po pa distinguished three paths: sūtra, mantra, and Great Seal, also known as the path of inference (*pāramitāyāna*), the path of

<sup>17</sup> Rang byung rdo rje, Karmapa III (1995: 62): *sbyang gzhi sems nyid gsal stong zung 'jug la/ sbyong byed phyag chen rdo rje rnal 'byor ches/ sbyang bya glo bur 'khrul pa'i dri ma mams/ sbyangs 'bras dri bral chos sku mgon gyur shog*. For another translation, see Nydahl (1998: 70).

<sup>18</sup> *Lhun sgrub* is often translated by the term 'spontaneous', which derives from the Latin *spons, spontis* ('free will, own volition') and today connotes 'direct, voluntarily, by its own power'. Zhang Yisun reads: *lhun grub – l. lhun gyis grub pa ste 'bad med rang bzhin gyis grub pa/* = 'without effort, naturally present'. Accordingly, *lhun grub* expresses something which occurs effortlessly and is naturally present. Hence: 'effortless' or 'naturally/always present'. In this verse it supposedly indicates that the Buddha states have always been present.

<sup>19</sup> Karma 'phrin las pa, *Dris lan*, fol. 10a (p. 106): *sems nyid la blta ba lta ba'i mchog/ de la ma yengs pas gom pa'i mchog/ shugs 'byung du spyod pa spyod pa'i mchog/ gzhi thog tu lhun gyi grub pa'i sku gsum po mngon du gyur ba na 'bras bu mchog yin no/*.

<sup>20</sup> Sherpa (2004: 91–93; 158–162). Most writings in sGam po pa's collected works (*bka' 'bum*) (first printed in 1520) stem either from his students or are later compilations (Kragh 2006: 2 ff.). Kragh (1998: 12–26) also provides a good overview of the content, while Sherpa (2004: 79–91) analyses sGam po pa's life and his uniting of the two main transmissions he received and practised. The portrayal here is limited to the key ideas found in the writings of sGam po pa.

blessing (*mantrayāna*), and the path of direct perceptions.<sup>21</sup> The last is termed 'Great Seal' and considered a direct path for those of superior faculties. The novelty perceived in sGam po pa's teaching (whether rightly so or not) was twofold: firstly, the path of direct perception (sometimes also called 'path of blessing' although this term is normally considered to be tantra) was considered self-sufficient; secondly, students were introduced to the Great Seal without receiving prior tantric empowerment.<sup>22</sup>

According to 'Gos Lo tsā ba, Marpa and Mi la ras pa produced first 'inner heat/power' (Skt. *caṇḍālī*, Tib. *gtum mo*; one of Nāropa's six doctrines) and then realisation of the Great Seal in their students. But sGam po pa produced this realisation even in beginners who had not received empowerment: 'Gos Lo tsā ba called this 'general *pāramitāyāna* teachings'. sGam po pa also said that his Great Seal would have been taught indirectly in the *Samādhirājasūtra*, to the extent that by realising the Great Seal one would understand the hidden meaning of the sūtras. Additionally, sGam po pa accepted Great Seal practice in its 'classical' sense as a term for the ultimate awareness arising from the third empowerment in the context of the mantra path.<sup>23</sup> Most texts of the collected writings attributed to sGam po pa emphasise bKa' gdams and Great Seal instructions; mantra is taught occasionally.<sup>24</sup>

Sherpa suggests that the term 'Great Seal' may have been used here in two different senses: the realisation of the essence, superior to both sūtric and tantric paths, would be the older sense of the term. In its second sense—and here is discerned a similarity to the analysis of bKra shis chos 'phel above—it is a practical and pedagogical system that, on the basis of conventional Mahāyāna practices and analysis, culminates in the Great Seal. The name 'Great Seal' would thus refer to the sūtric path for the pedagogical reason that it eventually leads to experience of the 'real' Great

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<sup>21</sup> For the three paths system of sGam po pa, see Sherpa (2004: 130) and Jackson, D. (1994: 25–28). The three paths are, for example, depicted in sGam po pa bSod nam rin chen, *Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs*, pp. 527f. While the last path of the Great Seal is described as the one of direct perceptions (*mngon sum*), Sherpa (2004: 130), based on research on a range of texts, labels it 'path of blessing'. See also the Eighth Karmapa's Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII *Kam tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 6b (p. 968).

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 72).

<sup>23</sup> This is according to the later historian 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, p. 402 (Roerich 1996: 461–462). See also Jackson, D. (1994: 12).

<sup>24</sup> Sherpa (2004: 33) suggests that mantric instructions were taught under a veil of secrecy.



Seal.<sup>25</sup> This said, it remains difficult at present to ascertain sGam po pa's definitive position regarding a non-tantric Great Seal. The 'Bri gung pa exegete 'Jig rten mgon po, for example, offers a system 'where, in short, mahāmudrā is achieved outside of the "path of means" (*thabs lam*), but clearly within the tantric "path of liberation" (*grol lam*).<sup>26</sup>

In a reply to the First Karmapa (*Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan*), sGam po pa emphasised that 'his tradition' as a third path would make direct perception into the path. He also distinguished two kinds of individuals: those of 'gradual' (*rim gyis pa*) and those of 'simultaneist' (*cig car ba*) approaches to enlightenment. Direct access is restricted to the few persons of 'good capacities' (*skal ldan*) from former lifetimes; however, sGam po pa called himself *rim gyis pa* upon occasion.<sup>27</sup>

His advices for Great Seal-practice were sometimes termed 'profound instructions of the Great Seal, the union with the innate' (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor zab khrid*).<sup>28</sup> sGam po pa wrote about the innate (Skt. *sahaja*), a term associated with the Indian *dohā* literature: 'The innate nature of mind is the *dharmakāya*, and the innate experience is the light of the *dharmakāya*.<sup>29</sup> Karma 'phrin las pa comments:

<sup>25</sup> Sherpa (2004: 129–133). A similar analysis was provided in personal communication with Zhwa dmar Mi pham Chos kyi blo gros (Renchen-Ulm, August 2006). In his recent *Buddhistische Sichtweisen und die Praxis der Meditation* [*Buddhist Theories and the Practice of Meditation*], the late Zhwa dmar rin po che (Shamar Rinpoche 2007: 105–108) follows the threefold distinction by Kong sprul and bKra shis chos 'phel, considering essence Great Seal as an immediate transmission not necessarily linked to any of the other approaches (ibid. 107). But he distinguishes two approaches to sūtric Great Seal: one type would be based on *samatha*-practice and ensuing analysis of the mind, the teacher deciding when to point out the mind's true nature. The second approach, exclusively taught by sGam po pa, would be a direct way to combine sūtra and Great Seal and grounded upon the *Samadhirājasūtra* (ibid. 106).

<sup>26</sup> Sobisch (2011: 220).

<sup>27</sup> See sGam po pa bSod nam rin chen, *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan*; see also Jackson, D. (1992: 102 and 1994: 25 f.). For the sudden and gradual approaches in Central and East Asian Buddhism, see Stein (1987), Gomez (1987), Gimello and Gregory (1983), and Ueyama (1983). For studies of the early Dun huang material see, for example, Meinert (2002, 2003 and 2007) and Van Schaik (2004).

<sup>28</sup> For the purpose of this work, the Sanskrit term *sahaja* (Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa*) is rendered with the help of the expression 'innate', and *lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes* as 'innate (absolute) wisdom'. At times the phrases 'simultaneously arisen' or 'co-emergent' appear to be more suitable. It seems that any attempt to translate them should never be considered out of the given context. See also Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, *Grub mtha'*, p. 115, and Kragh (1998: 32–36).

<sup>29</sup> sGam po pa bSod nam rin chen, *Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs*, p. 545: *sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos sku dang/ snang ba lhan skyes chos sku'i 'od yin zhes*.

'The inherent nature of mind is the *dharmakāya*' denotes that very nature of the unborn mind. 'The inherent experience is the light of the *dharmakāya*' refers to the boundless radiance of mind. Both the mind and its light are not incompatible—they are of the same nature, like the sun and its rays.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the meditator is to understand that which appears (*snang*) and that which is aware of it (*sems nyid*) (in other words mind (*sems*), conceptualisation (*rnam rtog*), and *dharmakāya*) have always arisen simultaneously. The goal of this understanding is direct experience of the highest truth (Skt. *paramārtha-satya*), free from fabrications (Skt. *niṣprapañca*). In order to make it accessible to, or unite it with (*sbyor*), one's mind, one applies instructions (*gdams pa*).<sup>31</sup> The meditative training of the Great Seal consists in training to let the mind rest 'uncontrived' or 'without artifice' (*ma bcos*). This path is intrinsically linked with a qualified teacher, who 'points out the [nature of] mind' (*sems kyi ngo sprod*) and to whom devotion is required. A further key term is 'single efficacious white [remedy]' (*dkar po gcig thub*), attributed to Lama Zhang.<sup>32</sup>

Following sGam po pa's time, there appeared the so-called four greater and eight minor bKa' brgyud schools, also named 'Dwags po bKa' brgyud' after sGam po pa's native land.<sup>33</sup> Of the bKa' brgyud traditions, the Karma bKa' brgyud has its own illustrious history. The First Karmapa and founder of the lineage, Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193), was a main student of sGam po pa.<sup>34</sup> Tradition claims that at the moment of the First Karmapa's

<sup>30</sup> Karma 'phrin las pa, *mGur*, p. 33: *sems nyid lhan skyes chos kyi sku zhes pa/ /skye med sems kyi gshis lugs de nyid yin/ /snang ba lhan skyes chos sku 'od de ni/ /'gag med sems kyi gdangs la gsung bar gda' / /sems dang de yi 'od gnyis mi 'gal te/ /nyi dang zer ba bzhin rang bzhin gcig pa'ol*.

<sup>31</sup> A definition by Phag mo gru pa, according to Schiller (2002: 144, n. 452): *Sems dang rnam rtog chos sku gsum/ dang po (sic!) lhan cig skyes pa de/ /gdams pas sems su sbyor ba'i phyir/ /lhan cig skyes sbyor zhes su bshad/*. Also see Namgyal (1986: 224) and Jackson (1994: 11, n. 19).

<sup>32</sup> For a further depiction of the meditative path and the mentioning of the importance of devotion to the teacher with the aid of the works in the *Dwags po bka' 'bum*, see Kragh (1998: 32–39). For the term *dkar po gcig thub* in sGam po pa's answers and Zhang's *Phyag chen zab lam mthar thug*, see Jackson, D. (1994: 150–158).

<sup>33</sup> Among sGam po pa's students were: Phag mo gru rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170), 'Bri gung 'Jigs rten gsum dgon (1143–1217), and the unconventional Lama Zhang brTson grus seng ge (1123–1193), a disciple of sGam po pa's nephew. Writings of these influential masters constitute significant sources for examination of the early Great Seal. 'Greater' and 'minor' are not hierarchical terms, but indicate relative closeness to sGam po pa or to his nephew, Dwags po sGom tshul (1116–1169). For an overview of the bKa' brgyud branches, see Smith (2001: 47–49).

<sup>34</sup> According to Kong sprul's *gDams ngag mdzod* (translated in Kapstein 2007: 118), Karma Pakṣi taught the Great Seal in such instructions as the 'four-pointed wheel of reality' (*gnad*

awakening he was presented with a vajra crown, or black crown, which had been woven by the female Buddhas or *dākinī* from their hair. Hence he was called ‘Zhwa nag Karmapa’ meaning ‘Black Hat Karmapa’. The Karmapa is credited with being the first reincarnate lama of Tibet.<sup>35</sup>

The writings of the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), created a milestone in the tradition and remain significant until today.<sup>36</sup> One of his disciples, rTogs ldan grags pa seng ge, was later called the First Zhwa dmar pa (1283–1348), or ‘Red Hat’ lama.<sup>37</sup> A tradition of the Karma bKa’ brgyud asserts that the Karmapa and Zhwa dmar pa are of one mind (*thugs rgyud gcig par*), and as a result are sometimes called ‘Black Hat Karmapa’ and ‘Red Hat Karmapa’.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.1.3 *Sa skya Paṇḍita, Indian Great Seal, and Later Systematisations*

As was pointed out, in the thirteenth century aspects of the Great Seal of the bKa’ brgyud pa became highly contested. And, though Great Seal teachers

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*bzhi chos nyid kyi 'khor lo*), and the ‘pointing out the three bodies’ (*sku gsum ngo sprod*); the latter is contained in the Second Karmapa Karma Pakṣi’s *sku gsum ngo sprod*.

<sup>35</sup> The First Karmapa founded the monastery of Karma dgon in Eastern Tibet in 1147, and in 1193 founded mTshur phu, the main monastic seat of the Karma bKa’ brgyud in Central Tibet (Richardson 1980: 337; Wylie 1978: 38). For the concept of the reincarnate lama, see Goldstein (1973: 446–448) and Wylie (1978). While Richardson (*ibid.*) assumes that the name ‘Karmapa’ stems from the founding of the Karma monastery, tradition asserts that it is a slightly Tibetanised Sanskrit *karma* (‘action’) combined with the Tibetan nominaliser *pa*, making: ‘the person [doing] the [buddha] activity’ (Karma ‘phrin las pa, *Dris lan*, p. 162: *rgya skad karma zhes pa bod skad du las shes bya bar bsgyur dgos pas / sangs rgyas thams cad kyi phrin las pa yin pa’i don gyis na karma pa zhes grags pa’o*). For an elaborate presentation of the history of the bKa’ brgyud tradition and the Karmapas, the most significant Tibetan sources are *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston*; *Kaṃ tshang*, and, as far as the Karmapas are concerned, Nges don bstan rgyas, *Karma pa sku ‘phreng gyi rnam thar*. In English, see Roerich (1996: 473ff.), Smith (2001: 39–87), Thinley (1980), and Thaye (1990).

<sup>36</sup> A translation of the three significant texts (apart from the *Zab mo nang gi don*) into German can be found in Rang byung rdo rje, Karmapa III; trans. Draszczyk (1995: 42–67).

<sup>37</sup> See Roerich (1996: 523–532) for the First Zhwa dmar pa’s life. Also see Karma ‘phrin las pa’s short account in *Dris lan rnam par thar pa’i don bsdus bzhuḡs so* in Karma ‘phrin las pa, *Dris lan*, fol. 41a–43a (p. 168ff.).

<sup>38</sup> See for example Karma ‘phrin las pa, *Dris lan*, fol. 43b (p. 172), wherein he explains that the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakṣi (1206–1283), was reborn as both Karmapa and Zhwa dmar pa.

like Lama Zhang had already been criticised,<sup>39</sup> Sa skya Paṇḍita's (1182–1251) critique had a lasting impact.<sup>40</sup>

David Jackson summarises Sa skya Paṇḍita's critique as follows: Sa skya Paṇḍita did not agree that (i) a single method or factor (even insight into emptiness presented as Great Seal doctrine) could suffice soteriologically, that (ii) the wisdom of the Great Seal could arise through an exclusively non-conceptual method, and (iii) that the Great Seal could ever be taught outside the Mantrayāna. As a consequence, it would follow that: (i) sGam po pa's Great Seal is to meditate on a mere idea of what Sa skya Paṇḍita considers the Great Seal, (ii) it is similar to Madhyamaka meditation (which takes a much longer time), (iii) or it is the Chinese Ch'an tradition of Hwa shang Mahāyāna in disguise (considered inauthentic following the debate of bSam yas), and does not accord with the Indian tradition (where the Great Seal is only taught in a tantric context).<sup>41</sup>

Whether Sa skya Paṇḍita's assessment was motivated by a need for accuracy or by religio-political issues, the bKa' brgyud traditions, aside from dismissing it as jealousy, sought to build historical and logical arguments defending sGam po pa's teaching.<sup>42</sup> Amongst the defenders, 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392–1481) indicated the Indian origins in the works of Jñānakīrti (tenth/eleventh century) and Maitrīpa (c.1007–c.1085) together with the latter's disciple, Sahajavajra.<sup>43</sup>

In his twenty-five *amanasikāra* works, Maitrīpa explains non-abiding (Tib. *rab tu mi gnas pa*, Skt. *apratiṣṭhāna*), and the meditation of 'not becoming mentally engaged' (Tib. *yiḍ la mi byed pa*, Skt. *amanasikāra*).<sup>44</sup> Other key texts are those of the Indian Great Seal siddhas: Saraha and Kāṇha's *Dohākoṣa*, Tilopa's *Mahāmudropadeśa*, and writings in the late

<sup>39</sup> See Jackson, D. (1994: 55–58). Polemics and debates have always been a part of Tibetan Buddhism (Smith 2001: 236–240).

<sup>40</sup> This was mainly expressed in Sa skya Paṇḍita's *sDom gsum rab dbye* and the *Thub pa'i dongs gsal*; for his strategy and the textual occurrences and further texts, see Jackson, D. (1994: 85–90, 161–189).

<sup>41</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 72); see also Kragh (1998: 52) and Van der Kuijp (1986). Kragh (1998: 61) has, on the basis of historical evidence from the *Deb ther sngon po*, suggested the plausible solution that Sa skya Paṇḍita's source for Great Seal teachings were those transmissions which he received via 'Brog mi Lo tsā ba. They would stem from a period in India ('Brog mi visited India between 1008–1021) where Maitrīpa's sūtra-tantra blend had not yet been disseminated (Maitrīpa's dates being possibly 1001–1087; see Tatz 1987).

<sup>42</sup> Jackson, D. (1992: 108).

<sup>43</sup> For 'Gos Lo tsā ba, his doctrines and defence of the Great Seal, see Mathes (2008).

<sup>44</sup> Mathes (2006: 205–206).

middle-Indian Aṣṭaśāstrī language.<sup>45</sup> Mathes, who does not wish to rule out Chinese influences, has concluded:

It can be shown that the practice described in the Indian *mahāmudrā* works does not need to be Tantric. In Saraha's *dohās* it is simply the realization of mind's co-emergent nature. Maitrīpa uses the term *mahāmudrā* for precisely such an approach, thus employing an originally Tantric term for something that is not a specifically Tantric practice. It is thus legitimate for Karma Bkra shis chos 'phel to speak of Saraha's *mahāmudrā* tradition as being originally independent of the sūtras and the tantras. For Maitrīpa, the direct realization of emptiness (or the co-emergent) is the bridging link between the sūtras and the tantras, and it is thanks to this bridge that *mahāmudrā* can be linked to the sūtras and the tantras. In the sūtras it takes the form of the practice of non-abiding and not becoming mentally engaged, while in the tantras it occupies a special position among the four *mudrās*.<sup>46</sup>

The interpretations of the bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal teachings following the thirteenth century can be regarded as a story of reception, commentary, apologetic, and systematisation of the practices and writings of early Tibetan masters like sGam po pa, and Indian proponents like Saraha and Maitrīpa. It has been noted that masters such as 'Gos Lo tsā ba and the Eighth Karmapa may have contributed to a shift of emphasis towards Maitrīpa as originator of the key Great Seal teaching; an assertion stemming from the earlier master rGod tshang pa (1189–1258?).<sup>47</sup>

Of fifteenth-century masters, the Seventh Karmapa, Chos grags rgya mtsho, deserves mention for his role in compiling the Indian Great Seal works. The Eighth Karmapa's teacher, Karma 'phrin las pa, composed the most significant direct commentaries on Saraha's three *dohā* of sixteenth-century Tibet (*Do hā skor gsum gyi ṭīka*). Other Great Seal masters, such as the Eighth Karmapa's contemporaries Padma dkar po and bKra shis nam

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<sup>45</sup> For the conundrum of Saraha in India, see Braitstein (2004: 16–39); for his Great Seal and songs, see (ibid. 68–82), Jackson, R. (2004: 53–117) and Guenther (1993); for his reception in Tibet, see Guenther (1969) and Schaeffer (2000). For further material on the *dohā* of Kāṇha and Tilopa, see also Jackson, R. (2004: 117–143) and Kværne (1977). For the *Mahāmudropadeśa*, see Tiso and Torricelli (1991). For the siddha traditions in India, see White (1996).

<sup>46</sup> Mathes (2011: 121).

<sup>47</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 82–84); he used 'Gos Lo tsā ba's *Deb ther sgnon po*, p. 784 and the Eighth Karmapa's *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* (Rumtek edition 1975), fol. 7b. This is further discussed in Chapter Six (6.4). According to Jackson, D. (ibid. 83), bKra shis nam rgyal, dPa' bo grtsug lag phreng ba, and Śākya mchog ldan follow the idea of the bKa' brgyud specific Great Seal as originating with Maitrīpa, Saraha, and Nāgārjuna.

rgyal, not only fervently defended their traditions but also contributed to more systematic manuals of progressive meditative practices.<sup>48</sup>

## 2.2 *Tibet from the Fifteenth to Sixteenth Centuries: Conflicts between dBus and gTsang*

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were characterised by scholastic systematisation and a solidification of teaching lineages and monastic establishments into religious sects.<sup>49</sup> As religion and politics intertwined throughout Tibet's history<sup>50</sup>, it is a significant possibility that the political situation described below decisively shaped this development.

The era extending from 1354 to 1642 is sometimes described as 'three major hegemonies'<sup>51</sup> or 'successive hegemonies'.<sup>52</sup> Three families successively controlled most areas of dBus and gTsang: the Phag mo gru pa (1354–c.1478), the Rin spungs pa (1478–1565), and the gTsang pa (1565–1642).<sup>53</sup> In the decades preceding the Eighth Karmapa's birth the religio-

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<sup>48</sup> The Seventh Karmapa compiled the Indian Great Seal texts (*rGya gzhung*) (bKra shis chos 'phel, *gNas lugs phyag rgya chen po'i rgya gzhung*, fol. 17a). His own commentaries on the Great Seal remain largely unexplored (see *Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. *nya*, pp. 377–416). For the importance of Karma 'phrin las pa's commentaries, see Schaeffer (2000: 9) and Rheingans (2004: 61–62, 182–186). The Great Seal is outlined and defended in Padma dkar po's *Phyag chen mgan mdzod* (see Broido 1987). While Great Seal meditative techniques are intended to be transmitted orally by a qualified teacher, written meditation manuals became increasingly popular. bKra shis nam rgyal's and the Ninth Karmapa's manuals mostly consist of three steps: (i) preliminary practice (*sngon 'gro khrid yig*), (ii) main practice, and (iii) perfection of practice (dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i phreng ba*; Namgyal 1986: 132–138). Sobisch (2003b: 10–13) assumes these more systematised stepwise guidances emerged due to the increasing number of disciples who engaged in such practices.

<sup>49</sup> Smith (2001: 241).

<sup>50</sup> Ruegg (2004b: 9–11). The concept of a centralised Tibetan state governed by a dGe lugs administration is highly simplistic, only holding true for a limited period (from 1642) in a limited region (Central Tibetan area). Previously, political structures and interrelations were more multi-faceted (Samuel 1993: 39–139; Samuel 2006: 25–46).

<sup>51</sup> Shakabpa (1967: 73).

<sup>52</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 117).

<sup>53</sup> During the preceding Mongol overlordship and Sa skya rule (1244–1354), monasteries had become more powerful than the nobility. Some consider this period crucial for the evolution of a more formal patron–priest relationship (*mchod yon*) and the interplay of religion and politics in Tibet (Ruegg 1991: 448). While the patron often sought to gain control over a certain area or population through presenting offerings to a revered teacher, lamas were in need of funding for and protection of their expanding monastic complexes (Schuh 1976: 219). For the Mongol period as a whole, see Petech (1990), Schuh (1986), Wylie (1977), and the later analysis of Everding (2002).

political situation was characterised by tension and clashes between the Phag mo gru pa of dBus and the gTsang-based Rin spungs pa. Yet, from the 1480s the Karma bKa' brgyud pa under the influence of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524), and the Seventh Karmapa (1454–1507) enjoyed a time of unprecedented honour and support from the Rin spungs pa, reaching its peak in the period between 1498 and 1517, when the Eighth Karmapa was born.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, academic research has not documented this period in detail.<sup>55</sup>

In 1354, after the decline of the Eastern Mongol empire, Tai Si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302–1364; an offspring of the rLang family), from the bKa' brgyud pa seat Phag mo gru, ended the primacy of the Sa skya pas under Mongolian patronage.<sup>56</sup> While the Phag mo gru pa lords were initially affiliated to the bKa' brgyud pa, they were also to become strong supporters of Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) and his disciples.<sup>57</sup> For the Phag mo gru pa, he represented an appealing example of learning and monasticism.<sup>58</sup>

Tsong kha pa had a considerable impact on Tibetan Buddhism, particularly on scholasticism and clerical education.<sup>59</sup> With him, an era began characterised by widespread scholastic activity and intellectual efflorescence: the beginning of high scholasticism.<sup>60</sup> In 1409, with the patronage of the Phag mo gru pa, he initiated the great yearly wishing prayer festival (*smon lam chen mo*) and founded the monastery of Ri bo dGa' ldan. His disciples embarked on the construction of further key dGe lugs monasteries: 'Bras spungs (1416) and Se ra (1419) in the vicinity of Lhasa, as well

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<sup>54</sup> See below, and Jackson, D. (1989a: 29 ff.).

<sup>55</sup> A comprehensive study based on a wide range of Tibetan sources is not yet accomplished (Kapstein 2006b: 116, 130). Accounts can be found in overviews on Tibetan history such as Tucci (1949), Snellgrove and Richardson (1968), Tucci (1980), Stein (1993), Samuel (1993), and Kapstein (2006b). Alternatively, scattered information on related persons or topics is found in various monographies, articles, and theses, such as Jackson, D. (1989a), van der Kuijp (1991b and 1994), Kramer (1999), and Rheingans (2004).

<sup>56</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson (1968: 153 ff.).

<sup>57</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 128). Petech (1990: 85–119) briefly documents the rise of Phag mo gru after the Mongol overlordship. For the life of Byang chub rgyal msthan, see van der Kuijp (1991b and 1994).

<sup>58</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 121).

<sup>59</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson (1968: 180–182). Ruegg (2004b: 326–343) examines Tsong kha pa's impact and exegetical method. For Tsong kha pa's life, see Kaschewsky (1971); for his relation to Re mda' ba, see Roloff (2003).

<sup>60</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 1). See also Dreyfus (2003: 142–48), who discusses the development within the monastic dGe lugs pa centres; see also Dreyfus (2005a: 293).

as bKra shis lhun po (1447) at Shigatse in gTsang. In consequence, the dGe lugs pa became a powerful spiritual and political force in dBus.<sup>61</sup>

Gradually, the Phag mo gru pa's rule was superseded by their own ministers, the lords of Rin spungs pa in eastern gTsang; after the civil war of 1434 and the death of the ruling head, Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1385–1432), the Phag mo gru pa leaders (*gong ma*) Grags pa 'byung gnas (1414–1445) and Kun dga' legs pa (1433–1482) became increasingly weakened.<sup>62</sup> 1478 saw the gradual seizure of power by the Rin spungs pas, under the leadership of mTsho skyes rdo rje (1462–1510) and Don yod rdo rje (1463–1512), general of the Rin spungs pa army encampment. Taking advantage of Phag mo gru pa's weakness, he assumed rule of the crucial rDzong Shigatse in Western Tibet.<sup>63</sup>

The Rin spungs pa were involved in a patron-priest relationship with the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, and supporters of the Seventh Karmapa. The Fourth Zhwa dmar pa was one of the most interesting figures of this period. He also had ties to the Phag mo gru pa and, like 'Gos Lo tsā ba (1392–1481), acted as a teacher of sPyan lnga Ngag gi dbang po (1439–1490), who was installed by the Rin spungs pa as Phag mo gru pa leader (*gong ma*) in 1481.<sup>64</sup> In 1493, after Ngag gi dbang po's passing, the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa was officially installed as sPyan snga of gDan sa thel monastery, the highest religious authority of the Phag mo gru pa. As Ngag gi dbang po's successor was still a minor, the Zhwa dmar pa *de facto* shared political responsibilities with some ministers since 1491.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson (1968: 177–204). See also Ehrhard (2004: 247) for the sponsoring of the dGe lugs pa by the Phag mo gru pa.

<sup>62</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 52).

<sup>63</sup> Shakabpa (1967: 86); Jackson, D. (1989a: 52).

<sup>64</sup> Richardson (1980: 346f.). For the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, see also Ehrhard (2002a: 9–33), Ehrhard (2004:249–250), and Tucci (1949:29–31) (extensive Tibetan sources are *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, pp. 1115–1150, and *Kam tshang*, pp. 194–224). On the occasion of Ngag gi dbang po's installment the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa was present, as was bKra shis dar rgyas, ruler of Bya yul and supporter of Karma 'phrin las pa and the Seventh Karmapa (Ehrhard 2002a: 23, n. 19, who used *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, pp. 1123–1124). For the relation of Bya bKra shis dar rgyas and the Seventh Karmapa and Karma 'phrin las pa, see Rheingans (2004: 64–66) and *Kam tshang*, p. 246.

<sup>65</sup> It is uncertain to what extent the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa was actually involved. dGe lugs historians, such as Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor, believe that he was the instigator of the 1481 invasion—the biography of the Zhwa dmar pa credits him with a diplomatic role (Jackson, D. 1989a: 47, n. 61). Richardson (1980: 347) generally depicts the Zhwa dmar pa as more politically involved than the Karmapa lamas, but his pioneering research was a first attempt to come to terms with the complicated political issues of that time. I shall look forward to the completion of the doctoral thesis *The Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Incarnate: A*



Meanwhile, the Rin spungs pa generals marshalled campaigns to gain control of the Lhasa region. In 1480, Don yod rdo rje closed in on Central Yar klung, together with armies from Yar rgyab and Gong dkar.<sup>66</sup> The dGe lugs pa felt threatened by the growing political power of the Rin spungs pa and their chief gurus; already mounting tensions magnified when, in 1489 and 1490, Don yod rdo rje accompanied the Seventh Karmapa twice to Lhasa, where he laid the foundation for the Thub chen chos 'khor monastery east of the city.<sup>67</sup>

After the Rin spungs pa were temporarily halted by the revolt of the dGa' ldan abbot sMon lam dpal (1414–1491), and distracted by a defeat in rGyal rtse, dBus again became their main focus.<sup>68</sup> This time, they were more difficult to stop. In 1492, an army of gTsang led by Don yod rdo rje and Nang so Kun dga' bkra shis, came through Yar 'brog and took some districts from Yar rgyab, Gong dkar, and sNel.

Then, around 1497, the Seventh Karmapa was attacked by dGe lugs pa monks in the vicinity of Lhasa and only survived by launching an escape to the 'Jo khang temple.<sup>69</sup> The Rin spungs pa and the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa

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*Comprehensive Study of the Life and Works of Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524)* by Kamilla Mojzes, University of Bonn, that I am currently co-supervising.

<sup>66</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 38). The Rin spungs pa also appointed gLang ri thang pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan as abbot of the important Sa skya pa monastery Nalendra, which was very close to Lhasa.

<sup>67</sup> According to the spiritual biography of the Seventh Karmapa, he founded the monastery (*Kam tshang*, 1972 edition, *sGrub brgyud karma kam tshang*, vol. I, p. 586: *Lha sa'i shar du thub chen chos 'khor gyi sde'i rmang bting/ 'di la rten 'brel ha cang 'grig che ba ma byung bar rje 'phrin las pa gsung bzhin bstan pa'i rgyun 'bring tsam zhig byung/ der chos rje mi nyag pa gshegs nas karma 'phrin las pa bskos/*.) An earlier passage, describing the spiritual biography of Karma 'phrin las pa, suggests (ibid. p. 652) that Karma 'phrin las pa may also have been involved in laying its foundation stone. In any case, it was situated to the east of Lhasa and Karma 'phrin las pa acted as a teacher there (Rheingans 2004: 72–73, 102–109). Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 37b (p. 223), attributes the founding of Thub chen to the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa.

<sup>68</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 65). The monks of 'Bras spungs and dGa' ldan gathered behind the powerful dGa' ldan and 'Bras spungs abbot, sMon lam dpal. He tried to shake off Rin spungs pa dominance through sorcery and the strengthening of their Central Tibetan patrons. Indeed, they revolted from 1485 to c.1488, when the Rin spungs pa were partly distracted from their hold on Central Tibet, mainly due to a defeat to the forces of rGyal rtse in 1485 (Jackson, D. 1989a: 54–58).

<sup>69</sup> An exact date has not yet been proven, though 1481 or 1497 are likely (Shakabpa 1967: 87; Jackson, D. 1989a: 49, n. 64). Jackson (ibid.) claims the Karmapa was a rather peaceful figure, refraining from using violence here. This incident led, however, to the Bya pa Khrid dpon (a student of the Seventh Karmapa) breaking away from the dBus alliance and joining the gTsang pa forces. To what extent these events motivated the campaigns has not been discovered and should be examined with the aid of proper and extensive source work.

were sorely provoked by the incident, though the Seventh Karmapa tried to calm the situation. Rin spungs pa lords pressed on to control the Lhasa region and 1498 saw their victory: a great army of dBus and gTsang marched to sKyid shod. This time the Bya pa lord, angered by the attack on the Seventh Karmapa, joined in.<sup>70</sup> In 1499, urged by the sTag lung pa and the Seventh Karmapa, the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa negotiated a relatively mild settlement for the sNel pa and dGe lugs monasteries.<sup>71</sup>

The dGe lugs' attack, however, did not go unpunished. Between 1498 and 1517, the Rin spungs pa enjoyed unlimited rule of dBus and gTsang. During this time they did not allow dGe lugs monks of Se ra and 'Bras dpungs to take part in the Great Prayer Festivals (*smon lam chen mo*), which were instead conducted by bKa' brgyud and Sa skya monks.<sup>72</sup>

From 1498 until his death in 1512, general Don yod rdo rje held a most powerful position. Don yod rdo rje commanded the construction of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa's Yangs pa can monastery (situated north of Lhasa) in 1503/1505.<sup>73</sup> This, along with the newly founded Thub chen monastery in the vicinity of Lhasa, may have reinforced the clashes between the dGe lugs pa and the Karma bKa' brgyud.<sup>74</sup> Given this context, it is likely that strategic, rather than religious, motivations were at heart of the issue, since it would have been futile for the Rin spungs pa to gain supremacy over the Phag mo gru pa in Central Tibetan dBus without first controlling the dGe lugs monasteries of Se ra and 'Bras dpungs.<sup>75</sup>

During the Rin spungs control (1498–1517), the Phag mo gru pa under Nga dbang bKra shis grags pa (enthroned in 1499 by the Rin spungs pa) continued to exist as mere figureheads. It was only in 1518, after the Rin spungs pa lords lost direct rule of dBus, that the ban of the dGe lugs monks from the Great Prayer Festival was removed at the petition of dGe 'dun rgya mtsho (1475–1542), the person later referred to as the Second Dalai Lama. He was able to do so in conjunction with the re-emerging power of

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<sup>70</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 39).

<sup>71</sup> Jackson, D. (1989a: 59) has used *Kam tsang* for the respective paragraph.

<sup>72</sup> In his work on the Second Dalai Lama, Mullin (1994: 94–98) accuses the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa of banning the prayer festivals; according to this author, he was attempting to strengthen his political position. However, he admits (ibid. 98): 'I have not looked into the actual history of the conflict over this festival in detail.'

<sup>73</sup> For the founding of the monastery Yangs pa chen and the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, see Wylie (2003: 485). Richardson (1980: 339) has the founding date of Yangs pa can as 1489.

<sup>74</sup> This was the opinion of the Eighth Karmapa's biographer and attendant Sangs rgyas dpal grub (Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 37b/p. 223).

<sup>75</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 130).

the Phag mo gru pa ruler, who on that occasion (in 1518) donated to him an estate close to 'Bras dpungs called 'Ganden Palace' (dGa' ldan pho brang).<sup>76</sup>

While the successor of the Second Dalai Lama, the Third Dalai Lama bSod nams rgya mtsho (1543–1588), sought to intensify relations with the Mongols, the Seventh and Eighth Karmapas continued to maintain links from afar with the Chinese Ming court, a practice begun by the Fourth Karmapa, Rol pa'i rdo rje.<sup>77</sup>

In summary, the Karma bKa' brgyud enjoyed a period of support from their Rin spungs pa patrons from the 1480s. During the first ten years of the Eighth Karmapa's life, the Rin spungs pa were at the height of their power and wealth, directly ruling major areas of Tibet (dBus, gTsang, and even parts of Nga' ris). The Eighth Karmapa inherited a politically influential yet delicate position in a religious climate of scholastic systematisation and sectarian developments. He avoided the traditional main centres of dBus and gTsang for thirty years until coming to his Central Tibetan main seat mTshur phu in 1537. During the later part of his life, he was confronted by, and had to balance, an unstable situation in dBus and gTsang, involving numerous local lords and ruling families (among others the Rin spungs pa, Phag mo gru pa, and the ascending lords of gTsang, the gTsang ba sDe srid).

This chapter began with a presentation of the sūtra, tantra, and essence Great Seal distinctions of the nineteenth century scholar Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas. Concentrating on sGam po pa's teachings as a key element of early bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal, it has briefly introduced problems of its classification and textual genres as less systematic and situational. After presenting the Great Seal debates and research about Indian sources for non-tantric Great Seal teaching, some of the Eighth Karmapa's contempo-

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<sup>76</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 131). It became the seat of him and his successors and, after 1642, under the Fifth Dalai Lama, the name of the estate became a label for the Central Tibetan government in general.

<sup>77</sup> For the Fourth Karmapa's relation to the Mongols, see Sperling (2004); for the Fifth Karmapa bDe bzhi gshegs pa's relation to Ming China, see Sperling (1980) and Schuh (1976). The Second and the Third Karmapas also had occasional ties with the Mongol court during its overlordship (*Kam tshang*, pp. 386; Richardson 1980: 341–344 and Kapstein 2006b: 131 ff.). The dGe lugs pa ties with the Mongols later ripened when the Fifth Dalai Lama called for help and thereby consolidated his power. But during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the rivalry between dBus and gTsang continued, deepening the rivalry of the dGe lugs and bKa' brgyud schools. During this period the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition still enjoyed influence, a situation that continued until the Tenth Karmapa, Chos dbyings rdo rje (1605–1674) (Smith 2001: 42).

raries and their systematisations were introduced. It was shown how the traditions tried to justify their essential practices. Finally, the political tension between dBus and gTsang and the religious atmosphere of scholasticism and the emerging schools were depicted, where religious hierarchs such as the Karmapa were often unavoidably entangled in political affairs.

## Chapter 3

### Textual Sources for the Eighth Karmapa's Life and Great Seal

Before inspecting the Eighth Karmapa's life and Great Seal, one must analyse the main sources. This chapter investigates the history of the Karmapa's writings, surveys the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, and selects and evaluates the textual sources employed in this thesis.<sup>1</sup> It identifies the closest possible textual witnesses and explains how their genres are particularly suitable.

#### 3.1. History of the Eighth Karmapa's Writings

The most common mode of Tibetan literary production was the hand copying of manuscripts, later adjoined by block-printing techniques. In the early fifteenth century, coinciding with the growth of Tibetan scholasticism, block-printing began to be practised extensively in Tibet and by the late fifteenth century it was used by all major traditions.<sup>2</sup> Block-printing, a

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<sup>1</sup> For a methodologically critical discussion of the use of Tibetan *mam thar* and hagiography for the study of history that expands some of the arguments mentioned later in this chapter, see Jim Rheingans, 'Narratology in Buddhist Studies' in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing*, edited by Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014), 69–112. The discussion of the sources for the life of the Eighth Karmapa under 3.4 is also summarised in the first part of Jim Rheingans 'Narratives of Reincarnation, Politics of Power, and the Emergence of a Scholar: the Very Early Years of Mi bskyod rdo rje and its Sources', in *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined: Biography in the Buddhist Traditions*, edited by Linda Covill, Ulrike Roesler, and Sarah Shaw (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), 241–299.

<sup>2</sup> While research on the history of block-printing is not yet fully exhaustive, it is clear that workshops developed by the fifteenth century (Ehrhard 2012: 149–150). The first Tibetan language blocks were probably the *Guhyagarbhatantra* and the works of Sa skya Paṇḍita printed in Mongolia/China at the Yuan court between 1310 and 1320 (Jackson, D. 1990a: 107 n. 1). The technology took root in Tibet in the fifteenth century, the earliest examples being *Guhyasamājamūlatantra* with Candrakīrti's commentary *Pradīpoddhyotana*, printed 1418–1419, and supervised by Tsong kha pa (Jackson, D. 1983: 5). Some of the old dGa' ldan and Gong dkar xylographs from the beginning of the fifteenth century probably belong to the earliest block prints in Tibet itself (Jackson, D. 1990a: 110). But the first Tibetan

lengthy process involving numerous individuals, necessitated funding for materials and craftsmen. Thus, mainly wealthy patrons or well-connected lamas could generate the funds for the printing projects.<sup>3</sup>

In the bKa' brgyud tradition, printing was partly established by gTsang smyon He ru ka (1452–1507) and some of his students.<sup>4</sup> Projects were also initiated at various bKa' brgyud monasteries, such as the 1520 publication of the works of sGam po pa at Dwags lha sgam po monastery, and the 1539 Rin chen ri bo edition of the collected works of the first Karma 'phrin las pa.<sup>5</sup> sGam po pa's works were mainly compilations that underwent significant alterations; the first blocks were carved in 1520, three-hundred and forty-seven years after his death.<sup>6</sup>

The first edition of the Eighth Karmapa's writings was a manuscript collection compiled in c.1555, soon after the Karmapa's passing in 1554 (without much editing, one presumes); block-prints were presumably issued slightly later. Crucial to the first manuscript compilation were the Eighth Karmapa's students, particularly the Zhwa dmar pa dKon mchog yan lag (1525–1583) and dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1504–1566), who served as scribe for some of the Karmapa's works.<sup>7</sup>

According to the history compiled by Si tu Paṇ chen, the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa met the Eighth Karmapa in the famous pilgrimage area of Tsa' ri and received the blessing (*byin rlabs*) to complete the collection of the Karmapa's writings (*bka' 'bum*). The Zhwa dmar pa obtained myriad Vajrayāna empowerments (*dbang*) and meditation instructions (*khrid*) from

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language bKa' 'gyur—the *Yongle* edition—was printed in 1410 in China (ibid. 111) (for the block-printing technique, see Jest 1961, Grönbold 1982: 386, and Sobisch 2005: 112–114). Still, it was not until the eighteenth century that the first Tibetan block-print edition of the bKa' 'gyur was manufactured in sNar thang in 1730–1732 (Jackson, D. 1990a: 108; Cabezon 2000: 236).

<sup>3</sup> Cabezon (2000: 237), Sobisch (2005: 112 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> For gTsang smyon and his printing activities, see Smith (2001: 59–79); for those of his students, see Ehrhard (2012) and Kragh (2006: 2).

<sup>5</sup> For the literary works of the first Karma 'phrin las pa, see Rheingans (2004: 132–192).

<sup>6</sup> Kragh (2006: 2 ff.).

<sup>7</sup> dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba was a main student of the Karmapa (see Chapter Four (4.2); *Kaṃ tshang*, pp. 357–365 and his spiritual memoir *Rang gi rtogs pa brjod pa 'khrul pa'i bzhiṅ ras 'char ba'i me long zhes bya ba bzugs so* in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, pp. 1530–1574). He acted as note-taker and scribe for Karmapa VIII, *Slob dpon dbyangs can bzang pos nye bar stsal ba'i dril bu rim pa lnga pa'i khrid*, fol. 103a/p. 981 and *dPal rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje*, fol. 128a/p. 1139.

his guru and noted certain instructions that may have formed the basis for the later table of contents.<sup>8</sup>

The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa began compiling the table of contents in 1547, seven years before the Karmapa passed away, and finished it in 1555, in his Central Tibetan monastery Yangs pa can, one year after the Karmapa's death.<sup>9</sup> This title list (abbreviated *dKar chag*) is valuable for verifying the contents of the Eighth Karmapa's works. The Eighth Karmapa composed an earlier list in 1546 in the context of his spiritual memoir *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*.<sup>10</sup> Both lists are utilised for determining the content and authenticity of the Eighth Karmapa's writings.

In dPa' bo's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, the collected writings (*bka' 'bum*) are stated to amount to 'slightly more than thirty volumes' (*gsum bcu lhag*), though as manuscripts or prints remains unclear.<sup>11</sup> Shortly after the Eighth Karmapa's passing, a golden manuscript, comprising thirty volumes, was made under the patronage of a rich noble nun of sKu rab named Chos mdzad ma rNam grol.<sup>12</sup> The *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* mentions this patronage

<sup>8</sup> Si tu Pañchen, *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 391: *slar tsa' ri mtsho dkar du phebs te bzugs/ rje thams cad mkhyen pa nyi kyi bka' 'bum yongs rdzogs kyi byin rlabs dang/ dbang rjes gnang khrid ka mang du gsan zhing/ der rje'i zhal nas/ so so'i skye bo'i bla ma des dam chos ston pa de yang rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi byin gyis rlabs pa'i mthu yin pas/ zhes sogs kyi zhal gdams gnang ba'i gsung zin bris kyang mdzad/*

<sup>9</sup> *dKar chag*, fol. 14b (p. 27) (*Selected Writings* edition p. 230). It states that the Zhwa dmar pa started when the Eighth Karmapa was forty years old and completed it one year after his death, i.e. 1547–1555. It was completed in the ninth month of the wood-hare year in the ninth cycle in bDe chen Yangs pa can. The *dKar chag* itself could not be dated. It is, however, contained in the collected works of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa dKon mchog 'bangs, *Selected Writings*. This edition consists of cursive written (*dbu med*) manuscripts from the library of the Zhwa dmar Rin po che.

<sup>10</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4b–10a (357–367).

<sup>11</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1313: *bka' 'bum ni rje pakṣi la'ang da lta po ti bcu drug las mi bzugs la rje 'di'i bka' 'bum po ti sum bcu lhag bzugs shing/ gdul bya la rje 'di'i gsung rams kho na nye bar mkho ba dang*. According to *Kaṃ tshang* (completed 1715), about twenty volumes (*pusti*) made up the Eighth Karmapa's works. Such a difference in volume numbers does not necessarily indicate a different number of texts. (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355: *bka' brtsams kyi skor la/ 'dul ba mdo rta'i 'grel pa/ mdzod ṭika/ 'jug pa dang/ mngon rtogs rgyan ṭika 'bri khung dgongs gcig gi rgyas 'grel/ rlung sams gnyis med kyi khrid yig /mos gus chen mo'i khrid yig dang/ sgyu ma chen mo'i rgyud 'grel sogs mdo sngags kyi gzhung chen du ma dang/ ka lā pa'i zh[wa] lu'i bshad sbyar dang/ sdeb sbyor ṭika'i mchan 'grel/ cha tshad kyi bstan bcos nyi ma'i me long sogs rig gnas kyi skor sogs gsung 'bum pusti nyi shu'i skor*) The 1984 catalogue of the Beijing Nationalities Library claims (Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang (ed.), *Bod gangs can gyi grub mtha'*, p. 17.): 'it is clear in the spiritual biography that there are twenty-eight volumes, however ...' (*pod nyi shu rtsa brgyad tsam yod tshul nram thar du gsal yang*). However, this claim is not verified in any of the spiritual biographies.

<sup>12</sup> Nor can sKu rab Chos mdzad ma rNam grol.

in the context of a discussion on how 'supports' (*rten*) were erected of the Karmapa's body, speech, and mind at bShad sgrub gling in Dwags po:

This being so, as receptacle of the [enlightened] body, the great statue (*rten*) of bShad grub gling was erected; and the receptacle of speech, a collected sayings (*bka'* 'bum) in gold was issued, sponsored by Chos mdzad ma rNam grol. The receptacle of [enlightened] mind is the special stūpa: And infinite were the receptacles (i.e. stūpas), made by monks and patrons with faith and wealth (*gra yon dad 'byor*) of many different areas, in which there were relics (*gdungs*) [of the Karmapa] with a share for each [contributing party].<sup>13</sup>

A manuscript in golden letters was the most expensive to produce, but their production was not unknown.<sup>14</sup> The sponsoring of such a work proves the nobles of the sKu rab area spared no expenses in supporting their guru, the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>15</sup> Nothing is known today of the remains of the golden manuscript, and the editors of the present *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* did not encounter it.<sup>16</sup>

As the golden manuscript was prepared soon after the Karmapa's death, it is presumed that the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, as his successor (along with

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<sup>13</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1324: *des na sku'i rten du bshad sgrub gling gi rten chen/ gsung gi rten bka' 'bum gser ma chos mdzad ma rnam grol gyis sbyin bdag mdzad nas bzhengs pa dang/ thugs kyi rten mchod rten khyad par can 'di yin la yul gru so so'i gra yon dad 'byor can rnams kyis rang rang gi skal ba'i gdung bzhugs pa'i rten bgyis pa ni mtha' yas so*. I interpret *gra yon* (reading *gra* = *grva*) as nominal phrase ("monks and patrons") with *dad 'byor* as adjective. *Gra* could also mean *grwa tshang*, "monastic college".

<sup>14</sup> Writing in gold ink on indigo paper is documented from the seventh century on (Zhongyi 2000: vol. I, 96). During the Yar klung dynasty canonical texts were written in this way. Sometimes silver, turquoise, and other materials were used. In 1413, the king of rGyal rtse financed a golden manuscript of *bKa' 'gyur* based on texts from sNar thang. Zhwa lu Lo tsā ba (1331–1528) spent fifteen years editing a golden *bKa' 'gyur* in the dPal 'khor chos sde monastery (Wangden 2006: 58 ff.).

<sup>15</sup> The area is an ancient division of the Southern Dwags po region (as defined in Zhang Yisun under *dwags po*; see also Dorje 1999: 285–289). The sKu rab nobles had been supporters of the Seventh Karmapa and Karma 'phrin las pa (Rheingans 2004: 25) and continued their patronage with the Eighth Karmapa. The Eighth Karmapa visited this area on various occasions (*Kam tshang*, p. 344, p. 351; Chapter Four (4.1.5, 4.1.6)) and had students from there. See for example, the *bDe mchog sgrub thabs* the Eighth Karmapa taught to sKu rab dbon po Kun dga' (ibid., fol. 2a/p. 803); and the instruction to sKu rab rnam rgyal *sKu rab rnam rgyal la gdams pa* in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *bLa ma'i lam la dga'ba'i slob ma gdams pa*, fol. 30a–33a.

<sup>16</sup> Karma bde legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 2–3. The context of the three 'bases' (*rten*) for body, speech, and mind, in which the passage mentioning the thirty volumes is found, might indicate a similar use for the Eighth Karmapa's collected works. Thus other ink manuscripts, probably the 'slightly more than thirty' volumes already referred to, were copied.



dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba), would have been involved in its production (and that of other early manuscripts in ink).

As receptacle of speech, [Zhwa dmar pa] arranged into a table as many treatises as could be found, in which this very master had made commentaries on the intention of the Buddha-words of sūtra and tantra as his own great texts (*gzhung*) and as commentaries of others; [the table] starting with the words: 'om *siddhirastu*, at once you wish to join peace and great bliss...'. He thus performed the "gathering of the enlightened sayings" (*bka' bsdu*). Meanwhile, Nor can sKu rab Chos mdzad ma did a substantial contribution of [wholesome] causes and conditions, too: the collected sayings in thirty volumes made from gold.<sup>17</sup>

The "gathering of the enlightened sayings" (*bka' bsdu*) is a very striking wording. It most likely illustrates the collecting of texts based on or resulting in a table, but may additionally refer to some kind of public reading (*lung*). The wording certainly seems to be an allusion to the councils of the Buddha. This *dKar chag* acted likely as a template for the earliest manuscript editions. It bears neither page nor volume numbers and offers only a topical outline.<sup>18</sup>

But when were blocks first carved for the Karmapa's works? In the present edition of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, only one text, a Kālacakra commentary, bears a printer's colophon indicating a xylograph printed before the nineteenth century. Concluding verses by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa suggest he witnessed the print process, and that it could well have taken place in Dwags po bShad sgrub gling.<sup>19</sup> As the first manuscript

<sup>17</sup> The gold manuscript and the issuing of the *dkar chag* is also mentioned in the spiritual biography of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 394: *gsung gi rten du mdo sngags kyi bka'i dgongs 'grel rje de nyid kyis rang gzhung dang/ gzhan 'grel du mdzad pa'i bstan bcos ji snyed pa rnams/ om siddhirastu/ gcig tu zhi ba'ang bde chen sbyor bzhed na/ /zhes sogs kyi dkar chag tu btad pas bka' bsdu mdzad pa bzhin/ nor can sku rab chos mdzad mas rgyu rkyen gyi nyer len kyang bgyis te/ gser rkyang gis bka' 'bum pusti sum cu/*

<sup>18</sup> The editors of the supplement have pointed this out (*ibid.* p. 2; see below 69–71, for a closer description of the rubrics and structure).

<sup>19</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *bCom ldan 'das dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'i sgrub dkyil phan bde kun tsol*, fol. 87b (p. 617). According to the colophon, this work summarises Kālacakra practice in accordance with commentaries of the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, mTshur phu 'Jam pa'i dbyangs Don grub 'od zer and the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi grags pa. The writer was Karma bDud rtsi zla ba, among others. An official (*nang so*) from sMyug la provided assistance and it was done in his area (i.e. sMyug la). The writing was compiled in a fire-sheep year (1547) during the summer (*chu stod*, Skt. *purvashadha*). It was compared with the text written by Mi bskyod rdo rje himself and underwent corrections. There follow verses paying homage to the Eighth Karmapa, along with information about a print (possibly done later). The verses were composed by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa in the Chos grwa tshang of Karma bShad grub gling. The print was supervised by Kun dga' rin chen and the scribe was Karma Tshe dbang. The blocks were carved by the master Chos

was completed after the Eighth Karmapa's passing, one may conclude that printing occurred between 1554 and 1583, the year of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa's death.

Exploring this hypothesis, it is plausible that the first blocks of a much larger collection were carved under the supervision of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa. Other evidence supports this: the spiritual biography of the First Karma 'phrin las pa (*Karma 'phrin las pa'i rnam thar*), authored by the Eighth Karmapa, is clearly a block print resembling part of a collection bearing the margin *ka* (as the first volume of a collection).<sup>20</sup> When compared to other sixteenth-century prints, similarities become apparent.<sup>21</sup> As block-printing was thriving in the bKa' brgyud pa lineages from the late fifteenth century, it is likely an edition of several major and minor works — if not the whole collection — was printed, presumably in bShad grub gling.

Prints from this period are rare.<sup>22</sup> This lends credibility to the oral history that printing the Karmapa's works was banned or highly restricted after 1642, when the Fifth Dalai Lama assumed power over dBus and gTsang.<sup>23</sup> This is supported by the fact that blocks of the Eighth Karmapa's collected works were found after the dGe lugs takeover in Zas chos 'khor yang rtse, a dGe lugs monastery near Lhasa, where they may have been stored after the ban.<sup>24</sup>

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skyong rdo rje slob dpon (probably vajra-master of this monastery) and others. Corrections were made by dBon po dGe legs dbang po.

<sup>20</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun Karma 'phrin las pa'i rnam thar*, blockprint, 7 fols (this work is a copy of a text from the Cultural Palace Library in Beijing, obtained in 2004 from Kurtis Schaeffer via David Jackson, Hamburg). As part of a larger volume, the text does not have a printing colophon.

<sup>21</sup> The print bears a similarity in outline and quality to the Rin chen ri bo edition of the First Karma 'phrin las pa's works, such as the *Dris lan* and *mGur* (Rheingans 2004: 132; 144–181).

<sup>22</sup> Most texts that form the basis for the modern edition from 2000 were manuscripts; at least they do not contain a printing colophon apart from the dPal spungs prints and the one exception mentioned earlier. The subtitle to the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* says: 'Printed from blocks kept at 'Bras spungs dGa' ldan Pho brang and Khams dPal spungs dgon, later reset electronically in Tibet.' (vol. 1, cover title). This is, however, misleading, as most sources were manuscripts (titles also found in the '*Bras spungs dkar chag* are listed there as *bris ma*). The blocks stem mainly from dPal spungs.

<sup>23</sup> Gene Smith, email communication, 13.09.2006 and also Gene Smith in the foreword to Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *sKu gsum ngo sprod* (1978 edition): 'The collected works of Mi bskyod rdo rje fill over 30 volumes. The blocks for printing his *gSung 'bum* were preserved at Zas Chos 'khor yang rtse in Central Tibet but the printing was highly restricted by the authorities.'

<sup>24</sup> Gelek Demo (ed.), *Three dKar Chags*, Introduction, p. iff. A passage in this survey of blocks stored in dBus and gTsang indicates that blocks of the Eighth Karmapa's collected works

Other traceable witnesses for some writings of the Eighth Karmapa are thirteen volumes of manuscripts probably derived from the palace of gTsang, brought to Beijing after 1959 and later returned to Tibet.<sup>25</sup> A table of contents of these manuscripts was published in 1984 and some texts found entry into the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.<sup>26</sup>

During the non-sectarian (*ris med*) movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the scholars of dPal spungs produced new carvings of the blocks for a number of the Eighth Karmapa's studies, such as those on the *Madhyamakāvatāra* and *Vinayasūtra*, and a few other texts such as meditation instructions (*khrid*) and yogic instructions on the inseparability of wind and mind (*lung sems dbyer med*). However, only parts of his *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* were put into print.<sup>27</sup>

The exact history of the literary works of the Eighth Karmapa will be speculative until further sources can be found and examined. At present, it is possible to conclude that the span between the Eighth Karmapa's death and the organising of a manuscript collection was short, and thus a relatively close record of his works is available when using early title lists for verification. Additionally, a possible first printing was issued shortly thereafter, block-prints being rare between the seventeenth and nineteenth century.

### 3.2 *The Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa 2000–2004: Origins and Rubrics*

The twenty-six volume *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* consists of newly discovered texts digitally inputted in Tibetan *dbu chen* script. Its compilation, editing, and printing were funded by the Tsadra Foundation.<sup>28</sup>

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were stored in this monastery (ibid. *Gangs can gyi ljongs su bka' dang bstan bcos sogs*, p. 212: *Zas Chos 'khor yang rtser/ karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i gsung 'bum/*.) This survey was conducted by the sTag regent Ngag dbang gSung rab mthu stobs (1874–1952) in the 1940s or 1950s.

<sup>25</sup> Gene Smith, email communication, 16.11.2006. It is doubtful, where these texts come from or whether they were copies of either the golden manuscript or early prints.

<sup>26</sup> Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang (ed.), *Bod gangs can gyi grub mtha'*, pp. 4–18.

<sup>27</sup> The Karmapa's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa* was printed in 1925. The author of the concluding wishes is the same in other dPal spungs prints and one may conclude most blocks were carved at the start of the twentieth century. As indicated by the concluding wishes, printing was supervised by 'Jam dbyangs Chos kyi rgyal mtshan alias Blo gros rgya mtsho (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi 'grel pa*, vol. II (vol. 11), fol. 504/p. 1008).

<sup>28</sup> Tsadra Foundation was founded by students of the late Kong sprul Chos kyi seng ge (1954–1992), a prominent teacher of the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage in the West (Coleman 1993:

First, one must determine the origin of the textual sources made available with this latest compilation effort. A supplement at least partly authored by Karma bDe legs outlines the sources vaguely.<sup>29</sup> It explains that besides some previously published texts, the central contributions stem from two incomplete versions of the Eighth Karmapa's writings discovered in the monastery of 'Bras spungs.<sup>30</sup> Manuscripts formerly stored in Beijing were integrated; however, of thirteen texts only twelve remained. The order of the texts and the arrangement of volumes were left unclear from the 'Bras spungs material. The editors thus used the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa's table of contents in arranging the collection.<sup>31</sup> As only a single text's origin is expounded in any depth, the sources for the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* are obscure.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, using the editorial supplement and a survey of the individual colophons one can determine the following origins:

- i. Two versions of manuscripts stored in 'Bras spungs (a), manuscripts from the Potala (b), and manuscripts from the Nationalities Palace in Beijing (c).
- ii. Four commentaries from dPal spungs on *Madhyamakāvatāra*, *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, *Vinayasūtra*, and *Abhidharmakośa* (these had been already typed by a team working with dPon slob Rin po che). The supplement does not mention that they also used other dPal spungs prints such as the meditation manuals (*khrid yig*) in two volumes.<sup>33</sup>

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227–228). One of those responsible for compiling and inputting the texts in Lhasa was Karma bDe legs (Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 49; oral communication with Burkhard Quessel, Curator of the Tibetan Collection British Library, London, September 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 4. Some of the titles can be found in the *'Bras spungs dkar chag*, a list of titles from the library of 'Bras spungs monastery. It is, however, unlikely that the editors had access to all the texts or that all of them are still extant: only forty-one titles indicating Mi bskyod rdo rje as author are found, among them, the commentary to the *Mahāmāyātantra*, *Ma hā mā yā'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa* (*'Bras spungs dkar chag*, p. 899). This text is missing from the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* and could not yet be located elsewhere.

<sup>31</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Karma bDe legs discusses some issues surrounding the Karmapa's *gSang sngags snga 'gyur las 'phros pa'i brgal lan rtsod pa med pa'i ston pa dang bstan pa'i byung ba brjod pa drang po'i sa bon* (*Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* vol. 3, pp. 350–486, 69 fols). He states that they found three versions in question: one in 'Bras spungs, one in Nyag rong, and one in Ri bo che (Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 47). For the remaining information, see *ibid.* pp. 2–5.

<sup>33</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gDams khrid man ngag gi rim pa 'chi med bdud rtsi'i ljon bzang*.

- iii. Texts reprinted by the Sixteenth Karmapa in India. (No mention of details is made).
- iv. The text of the Kālacakra commentary (mentioned above), the *Phan bde kun stsol*, printed in woodblocks in Karma bshad sgrub gling and sponsored by *Slob dpon Kun dga' rin chen*, the postscript having been written by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa.
- v. 'Various writings and prints that were found in dBus and gTsang' (*kham sdbus kyi bris dpar ci rigs myed pa rnams*), later specified as from dPal spungs in Khams, Nang chen, Nyag rong.<sup>34</sup> This is the most obscure category.
- vi. Additional texts not mentioned in the table of contents of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa. The editors discovered them, remarking that the name Mi bskyod rdo rje appears on them. But it is unclear whether this is the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>35</sup>
- vii. There is mention of another text which does not appear in the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa's table of contents. The editors consider it to be in the actual handwriting (*phyag bris dngos*) of the Eighth Karmapa. However, no mention is made to which text this refers.

The nature and origin of each text (especially the substantial 'Bras spungs texts) remains unclear. It is certain, however, that most were manuscripts.<sup>36</sup> The procedure for inputting the texts is described as follows: the texts were entered into the computer twice and the two versions compared, then compared six times with the original. Old or deviant spellings were not adapted to a modern standard.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 24. The texts were only identified after a thorough survey and are (all in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, volume number mentioned here for easier reference): *rJe btsun te lo pa chen po'i rnam thar*, vol. 1, pp. 687–718, 16 fols; *rJe btsun nā ro pa chen po'i rnam par thar pa dad pa'i shing rta*, vol. 1, pp. 719–764, 23 fols. *sGam po pa'i rnam thar don gsal sgron med*, vol. 1, pp. 765–800, 18 fols. *bDe mchog sgrub thabs*, vol. 1, pp. 801–804, 2 fols; *Shing rta chen po klu sgrub kyi bzhed pa'i bden gnyis kyi gnas snang thal 'gyur dang rang rgyud smra bas ji ltar 'dod pa dang dpal ldan dwags po brgyud ji ltar bzhed pa'i tshul gcig pa'i nges don 'khrul bral gyi glu dpal dbyangs can dga' bas mdzad pa*, vol. 2, pp. 524–567, 27 fols (the latter title was inserted a second time in vol. 25, pp. 7–26, 10 fols; this second version indicates the Eighth Karmapa as author).

<sup>36</sup> As briefly mentioned in a note above, the few texts listed in the 'Bras spungs dkar chag possibly indicates that these texts were used, but doubts remain—some texts listed there are still missing and only forty-one titles are listed.

<sup>37</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 5.

The invaluable merit of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* is that previously inaccessible works have now been made available. But philologically problematic areas remain. Some orthographical mistakes are not due to older spelling. Further, the actual texts in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* do not always correspond with the arrangement of texts in the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa's *dKar chag*. In certain cases, several texts were mistakenly placed under one heading, giving the impression that texts were missing; two texts were inserted twice.<sup>38</sup> At the end of the editorial supplement a list of texts not yet found (but listed in the table by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa) was appended. However, the list is misleading: some texts listed are not missing and some missing were not listed.<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that the editors were probably aware of these slight errors, as they termed the compilation the first step (*gom pa dang po*) towards safeguarding the texts.<sup>40</sup> This could have been achieved even more effectively had they also reproduced a facsimile edition of the original manuscripts.

Having surveyed the origins of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, its rubrics must briefly be considered. This permits not just an understanding of textual contexts, but illustrates the breadth of the Eighth Karmapa's scholarship. The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa split *dKar chag* into six sections (*mdor byas*), further subdivided.<sup>41</sup> The first section (i) contains 'the spiritual biographies which proclaim the good conduct of the [master] himself and others' (*rang gzhan legs spyad sgrogs pa'i nam thar*, i.a) and the vajra-songs (*rdo rje'i glu*, i.b). These are found in volumes one and two of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.

The second section (ii), filling volume three, contains a variety of texts: letters (*'phrin yig*, ii.a), praises (*bstod tshogs*, ii.b), questions and answers (*dris lan*, ii.c), advices (*bslab bya*, ii.d), and prayers (*smon lam*, ii.e). The

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<sup>38</sup> The *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* summarises thirty-six short instructions listed separately in the *dKar chag* (fol. 5b) as only one title *bLa ma'i lam la dga' ba'i slob ma gdams pa*, fol. 8a–9a (p. 579–581). The *bCom ldan 'das dus kyi 'khor lo'i ye shes btsan thabs su dbab pa'i cho ga rje btsun mar rgnog na brgyud pa* (*Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* vol. 1, pp. 805–824, 11 fols.) belongs, according to *dKar chag* (fol. 21a) to a later place, where it was inserted again (vol. 25, pp. 38–58); see also note 37 above. These are only two examples.

<sup>39</sup> Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 44–46. See below, for a brief outline of missing texts.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> See *dKar chag*, fol. 1b (p. 2), for the section distinctions described in the following. Under each heading there are further subdivisions (ibid. fol. 2a/p. 4, fol. 7b/p. 13, fol. 12a/p. 22, fol. 14a/p. 26).

third section (iii), labelled 'extensive commentaries which clarify the intended meaning of sūtra and mantra' (*mdo sngags rnams kyi dgongs don gsal byed pa'i rgyas 'grel rnams*), comprises volumes four to sixteen and includes commentaries on Indian treatises (*rgya gzhung*). Volumes seventeen and eighteen contain the texts of section four (iv): the rituals (*cho ga*) and *sādhana*s (Tib. *sgrub thabs*) 'for granting the state of the vajra-body' (*rdo rje'i sku yi go 'phang sbyin pa'i phyir cho ga sgrub thabs*). The fifth section (v) consists of, among other texts, the meditation instructions (*khrid*) and is found in volumes nineteen to twenty-five. The sixth section (vi) is designated the 'common sciences' (*thun mong rig gnas*), such as grammar and linguistics, and fills the twenty-sixth and hereby the final volume.

The table by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa lists over four hundred texts. Approximately two hundred and fifty entries are found in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*. However, a few titles are subsumed under one entry in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, increasing the number of texts to around three hundred. Three works not included in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* (but listed in either of the title lists) can be located elsewhere, mainly on microfilms of the NGMCP.<sup>42</sup>

Collating the texts available with the table by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, fifty-two works are presently missing. Most missing texts indicate that parts of certain sections are missing, for example the first eleven titles of the letter section (*sprin yig*, ii.a) and a few entries of the praises (*bstod tshogs*, ii.b). Additionally, some shorter commentaries and a disputational text (*dgag lan*) cannot be found in the commentary section.<sup>43</sup> Within the ritual section, mainly works on the Kālacakra, Cakrasaṃvara, and cutting (*gcod*) practices have yet to be located, and from the grammatical treatises only the commentary on Sanskrit grammar is extant.<sup>44</sup> Other missing texts are: a

<sup>42</sup> Among these, a manuscript that will be used in this thesis is *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *mNyams med dags* [sic!] *po bka' brgyud kyi gdam pa'i srogi* (abbrv. for *srog gi*) *yang snying*, (NGMPP, Reel no. E 12794/6) 9 fols (listed in *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 8a/p. 364). Those listed in *dKar chag* are: *gZhan stong legs par smra ba'i sgron me* (NGMPP, Reel no. 2496/3) 20 fols, blockprint; *dGongs gcig kar ſik dum bu lnga pa* (NGMPP, Reel No. E 2943/3), 151 fols, manuscript, *dbu med*; *Gangs ri'i khrod na gnas pa gtse? rdor? grur? pa skyabs med ma rgan? tshogs la sha zar mi rung ba'i springs yig sogs* (NGMPP Reel No. E 2943/4) 26 fols.

<sup>43</sup> For the missing letters and praises, see *dKar chag* fol. 4a (p. 6); see *ibid.* fol. 8b (p. 15), for the *dGa' ldan gangs can phyi ma dag gi lta grub kyi nram gzhag la brgal lan nges don rdo rje'i zer phreng*.

<sup>44</sup> For the missing ritual texts, see *dKar chag* fol. 21a/p. 20 (an example is the practice of the white Cakrasaṃvara entitled *bDe mchog dkar po'am sgrub dkyil dpal ldan bla ma dam pa*

commentary on *Mahāmāyā* (*sGyu ma chen mo'i rgyud 'grel*), a treatise on the proportions (*Cha tshad kyi bstan bcos nyi ma'i me long*), a commentary on synonyms (*sDeb sbyor ũka'i mchan 'grel*), and the *Mos gus chen mo'i khrid yig* (*Meditation Manual on Great Devotion*).<sup>45</sup>

Despite some philological infelicities of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, the textual material relevant to this research is predominantly complete: significant early spiritual biographies are available and relevant texts on the Great Seal are abundant. Assertions made are thus grounded on a relatively complete foundation of primary sources.

### 3.3 Sources on the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal

As one strain of this thesis investigates how the Karmapa taught the Great Seal to particular students, shorter works emerging from or documenting specific teaching situations are employed. Case studies in Chapter Five investigate the dialogues in a spiritual biography (a genre treated below), a question and answer text, an esoteric precept (*man ngag*), and a piece of advice (*bslab bya*). Justification and detailed outline of these 'instruction genres' is the focus of Chapter Five. Writings from these genres, along with other meditation instructions (*khrid*) and commentaries, form the core of Chapter Six. This section discusses the main sources and genres, some additionally employed texts and the overall occurrence of the Great Seal in the Eighth Karmapa's writings.

The question and answer texts of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* are contained in volume three (section ii.c). Question and answer texts (*dris lan*) are predominantly written answers to one or more questions,

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*rdo rje 'chang chen po tshe gcig la sgrub byed bcom ldan 'das rdo rje 'chang chen po nas rtsa ba'i bla ma'i bar du byon pa'i thugs la gab pa'i man ngag*). *Ka lā pa'i mdo'i 'grel pa gzhung don gsal ba* (*Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 26) is the Karmapa's commentary on grammar. For the three missing grammatical treatises, see *dKar chag*, fol. 14a /p. 26. The Eighth Karmapa's treatises on traditional Tibetan grammar (*sum bcu pa, rtags 'jug*) and composition (*sdeb sbyor*) are not available.

<sup>45</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355: *bka' brtsams kyi skor la/ 'dul ba mdo rta'i 'grel pa/ mdzod ũka/ /jug pa dang/ mngon rtogs rgyan ũka 'bri khung dgongs gcig gi rgyas 'grel/ rlung sems gnyis med kyi khrid yig /mos gus chen mo'i khrid yig dang/ sgyu ma chen mo'i rgyud 'grel sogs mdo sngags kyi gzhung chen du ma dang/ ka lā pa'i zh[w]a lu'i bshad sbyar dang/sdeb sbyor ũka'i mchan 'grel/ cha tshad kyi bstan bcos nyi ma'i me long sogs rig gnas kyi skor sogs gsung 'bum pusti nyi shu'i skor* The *Mos gus chen mo'i khrid yig* may be the *Mos gus phyag chen gyi khrid zab mo rgyal ba rgod thsang pa'i lugs* in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 19, pp. 679–725, 24 fols. This is the only missing work of potential interest to this thesis.



often similar to letters and advices or occasionally instructions or precepts.<sup>46</sup> The genre already existed in India under the designation *praśnottara*,<sup>47</sup> and its Tibetan form has not been extensively studied.<sup>48</sup>

Question and answer texts figure prominently among early sources on the Great Seal; a significant portion of sGam po pa's *bka' 'bum* consist of questions and answers, meditation instructions, or notes (*zin bris*). While their contextual nature has not been explored, D. Jackson has drawn attention to the possibility that teachings were adapted to individual students.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, each of the twenty-five Indian *amanasikāra* works was Maitrīpa's reply to a different question.<sup>50</sup>

The question and answer section in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* consists of sixteen texts (no. 29 to 44 of volume three), varying in

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<sup>46</sup> In the case of the Eighth Karmapa's teacher, Karma 'phrin las pa, one finds eleven answers to questions in his writings. Topics range from questions on Buddhist vows, history, and Madhyamaka to tantric practice and the Great Seal. In most cases, the answers refer to written questions (e.g. in the form of a letter) and the reply can be assumed to have been formulated in writing, though the colophons do not always clearly indicate this (Rheingans 2004: 180–200).

<sup>47</sup> A term deriving from *praśna*, m – 'question'. With *uttara* it becomes *praśna-uttara* 'question and answer' (Monier Williams 1996).

<sup>48</sup> Zhang Yisun: *dri lan - gtam dri ba dang/ lan 'debs pa* = 'to ask a question and give a reply' thus: 'question and answer' and *ibid.*: *dris lan – dri bar btab pa'i lan/* = 'an answer to an asked question' thus 'answer to questions'. A related genre, the more polemical 'answers to refutations' (*dgag len*), has been examined to some extent by Lopez (1996). However, these respond to criticism rather than answer questions. Whereas *dgag len* have found entry into Cabezón and Jackson's typology (under 'Philosophical Literature'), the question and answer genre was overlooked (Cabezón and Jackson 1996: 30). Though no specific reason is given, this may have resulted from the sheer variety of topics they cover, which defies a strict content-based typology.

<sup>49</sup> Jackson, D. (1994: 32), referencing sGam po pa's *Phag mo gru pa'i zhus lan*, hints at teaching strategy. For the texts in the *Dwags po bka' 'bum* see Sherpa (2004: 95–125) and Kragh (1998: 12–26). Questions and answers (*ibid.* 18–20) such as the *Phag mo gru pa'i zhus lan* and the *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan* became prominent sources for Jackson, D. (1994: 25, 27, 30, 32) and Martin (1992: 244, 245, 247, 249). The teachings to an assembly (*tshogs chos*) were often notes of public teaching sessions (Kragh 1998: 15–17). Some early material on the Great Perfection consists of question and answer texts, such as the *rDo rje sems pa'i zhu lan* (Q, no. 5082); a version is also found among the *Dun huang* material (see Van Schaik 2004: 172, for a detailed account.) Sherpa (2004: 179) suggests that sGam po pa's teaching in general was very audience oriented.

<sup>50</sup> Mathes (2011: 96, n. 29) quotes the unpublished manuscript 'Bri gung chos mdzod, vol. ka, fol. 4a (quoted after Mathes): *de nas mai [text: me] tri pas lta ba rab tu mi gnas pa / bsgom pa yid la mi byed pa la sogs pa'i dam bca' mdzad pa la / so so'i dris lan gzhung phran nyi shu rtsa lnga byung la slob ma rnams kyi yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor nyi shu rtsa lnga zhes pa'i tha snyad byas sol.*

length from two to sixty-nine folios.<sup>51</sup> From among the sixteen question and answer texts, ten contain major passages or questions related to the Great Seal.<sup>52</sup> This thesis has chosen the *gLing drung pa a 'dor ba'i dris lan* (*Answer to a Question by gLing drung A 'dor ba*) for a detailed case study. It presents doctrines and stories centring on the criticism of Sa skya Paṇḍita and the topics of tantra and essence of the Great Seal, as well as remarkable historical details.

Adjoining this, passages from other texts are drawn on for doctrinal comparisons: *bLa ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, 3 fols (*Answer to a Question by Lama Khams pa [About] One Person having two [Kinds of] Mind*), *Shel dkar bla ma chos kyi rgyal mthsan gyi dris lan*, 3 fols (*Answer to a Questions of Shel dkar Lama chos kyi rgyal mthsan*), and *Ne ring pa 'phags pa'i dris lan*, 6 fols (*Answer to a Question by Ne ring pa 'Phags pa*).

Pieces of advice (*bslab bya*) bear similarities to both meditation instructions and letters, often being written and sent upon the request of an individual. Of fifty-four advices (*bslab bya*) in volume three of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, eight consider the Great Seal. The two used as main sources are *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag*, 2 fols (*Great Seal Esoteric Precept*) and the *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, 10 fols (*Identification of the Blessing of the Great Seal*).<sup>53</sup>

Meditation instructions (*khrid*) and esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) are closely related key genres for Tibetan Buddhist practice.<sup>54</sup> The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa labelled the *khrid* section of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* 'the sūtra and tantra instructions which apply one to the highest

<sup>51</sup> One title is thus far missing: *Ne ring yig mkhan gyi dris lan* (*dKar chag*, fol. 5b /p. 9).

<sup>52</sup> Apart from the Great Seal, topics range from the practice of transmission [of consciousness] ('*pho ba*) (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma bstan 'dzin gyi 'pho ba'i dris lan*, 3 fols) to the ritual practice of the protector Mahākāla (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *dPal ye shes mgon po sgrub pa mams kyi dris lan*, 3 fols). A debate with the rNying ma pa is also included.

<sup>53</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag* is contained in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *bLa ma'i lam la dga' ba'i slob ma gdams pa*, fol. 8a–9a (p. 579–581). In the title list by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa the texts are listed separately and this one is entitled *Phyag rgya chen po man ngag tu gdams pa* (*dKar chag*, fol. 6a/p. 10).

<sup>54</sup> Some use instructions (*gdams ngag*) as overarching category, some authors prefer meditation instructions (*khrid*). Kapstein (1996: 275–276) notes the similarity of *gdams ngag* and *man ngag* and their relation to related genres. The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa subsumes instructions under the heading of *khrid* (*dKar chag*, fol. 12a/p. 22). The closest Indian template is the *upadeśa*, rendered in Tibetan as *man ngag* (also found for *man ngag* is *āmnāya*; further Skt. *nīta* for Tib. *khrid* and Skt. *āvavādaka* for Tib. *gdams ngag*).

magical absorptions' (*sgyu 'phrul ting 'dzin mchog la sbyor byed pa'i mdo sngags khrid*).<sup>55</sup> Of those, the shorter meditation instructions (*khrid thung*) in volume nineteen are of particular note. This thesis refers to passages from the *Phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i zin bris*, 3 fols (*Note of the Prerequisites for Cultivating the Great Seal*) and *Kam tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, 20 fols (*Meditation Instruction for the Kam tshang Great Seal Practice*).

The major instructions contained in volumes twenty to twenty-five focus mainly on Great Seal in its tantric context, discussing the six doctrines and the subtle energy systems alongside elaborate descriptions of completion stage practices.<sup>56</sup> This thesis occasionally refers to passages in two lengthy works in volume twenty-four.<sup>57</sup>

Regarding other occurrences of the Great Seal in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, we find texts in the vajra song (*rdo rje'i glu*) section (i.b), not taken into consideration, and in a bulk of material in the commentary section. Among those, this thesis refers to the previously studied introduction to the Madhyamaka commentary *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*. Volumes five, six, and seven are devoted to the *dgongs gcig* ('same intention') teaching of the 'Bri gung pa, relevant to the Great Seal. Shorter commentaries dealing with key areas of the Great Seal can be found in volume fifteen. Of these, the thesis employs the *Glo bur gyi dri ma tha mal gyi shes par bshad pa'i nor pa spang ba*, 5 fols (*Giving up the Mistake to Explain Superficial Obscuration as the Ordinary Mind*), as it presents a comparatively comprehensive overview.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa divided this point into further subtopics. The scheme Zhwa dmar pa used is the famed four dharmas of sGam po pa, which denote a stepwise progress through the stages of Buddhist practice: *dKar chag*, fol. 12a (p. 22): *mdor byas lnga pa la blo chos su 'gro ba'i khrid/ chos lam du 'gro ba'i khrid/ lam 'khrul pa sel ba'i khrid/ 'khrul pa ye shes su 'char ba'i khrid de bzhi las*. See Sherpa (2004: 137–142) on sGam po pa's four dharma theory and its interpretations by Padma dkar po and La yag pa.

<sup>56</sup> See for example the Eighth Karmapa's Mi bskyod rdo rje's bulky *sKu gsum ngo sprod* (874 fols) and *Lung sems gnyis med* (287 fols) volumes. Far too extensive and slightly deviant from the main topic of this thesis, these yogic instructions deserve future attention.

<sup>57</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po sgros 'bum* (233 fols) and *dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung las 'phros pa'i 'bel gnam kha shas* (109 fols).

<sup>58</sup> This work also appears in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGyal dbang karma pa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad sogs*, vol. 3, pp. 393–408, 8 fols and in *Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 8 (nya), pp. 475–488. The other texts are: *Hva shang dang 'dres pa'i don mdzud tshugs su bstan pa Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1083–1094, 6 fols; *Yid la mi byed pa'i zur khra*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1095–1100, 3 fols (*Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 8 (nya), pp. 507–514); *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*, *Collected Works of the*

### 3.4 *Spiritual Memoirs and Biographies of the Eighth Karmapa*

The primary sources used to examine the Eighth Karmapa's life belong to the *rnam thar* and *rang nam* genres (translated as 'spiritual biography' and 'spiritual memoir', respectively). These provide the greatest detail of events in the life of a Tibetan saint; being a type of hagiography as studied in other religious contexts.<sup>59</sup> Considered 'tradition' as opposed to 'remains', the label '*rnam thar*' signifies that they were intended to be read as an account of a saint's life.<sup>60</sup>

Spiritual biographies vary immensely in both type and scope, ranging from informative life accounts, rich in historical and ethnographic detail, to tantric instructions, eulogies, and even works containing empowerment rituals. However, predominantly they form a narrative genre in which certain topoi of the life of a Buddhist saint are included, ones easily discernable to readers and forming the key constituents of the plot.<sup>61</sup> As with other aspects of Tibetan Studies, the *rnam thar* genre has not been extensively examined by academics.<sup>62</sup>

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*Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1025–1038, 7 fols; *Rang la nges pa'i tshad ma zhes bya ba'i 'grel pa gnas lugs bdud risi'i nyin khu*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1039–1058, 10 fols; *rGya gar gyi phyag chen sngon byung dwags brgyud kyi sgros kyis rgyan pa*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1059–1071, 7 fols (*Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 8 (*nya*), pp. 489–506); *rJe btsun mi las rje sgam po pa gdams pa'i mgur 'grel*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1105–1110, 3 fols (*Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 8 (*nya*), pp. 431–434).

<sup>59</sup> Other genres that can assist the acquiring of information regarding the life of a Tibetan master are abbatial chronicles (*gdan rabs*), records of teachings received (*gsan yig*, *thob yig*; see Sobisch 2003b), and tables of contents (*dkar chag*). This thesis additionally uses the colophons of texts written by the Eighth Karmapa and the previously mentioned title lists and table of contents.

<sup>60</sup> 'Remains' is used for artefacts; not intended as sources for the subject investigated. However, the classification seems to be controversial (Faber and Geiss 1992: 82ff.). Marwick (2001: 172–179) discusses what he terms 'witting and unwitting testimony'. The extent to which, in Tibetan culture, the *rnam thar* genres provide what one may term 'historical information' depends on individual texts.

<sup>61</sup> For the role of these occurrences, see Reginald A. Ray's introduction to Thinley (1980: 1–19).

<sup>62</sup> In his study of Tibetan historiographical literature, van der Kuijp (1996: 46–47) examined the 'history of religion' *chos 'byung* genre to some extent. Analysis of Indian spiritual biographies is found in Robinson (1996) and of Tibetan spiritual memoirs (*rang nam*) in Gyatso (1998: 101–123). Scattered remarks can be located in the studies mentioned below. Southeastern Buddhist hagiography has been studied by Kieschnick (1997) and Tambiah (1984). Compared to Buddhist hagiography, Christian hagiography has been studied extensively; see Dubois and Lemaître (1993), for research about Christian hagiography; and Head (2000), for an anthology of medieval Christian hagiography.

Roberts has indicated that the term *nam thar* in a Tibetan title probably first occurred within the early bKa' gdams pa traditions and was also used by sGam po pa. Early bKa' gdams pa scholars likely adapted the term as found in a verse of the translated *Bodhicāryāvatāra*.<sup>63</sup> The term *nam thar* translates the Sanskrit *vimokṣa*, meaning 'liberation, the experience of a meditating saint'.<sup>64</sup> A Tibetan definition of the term *nam thar* claims: '(i) a historical work of the deeds of a holy (*dam pa*) person or a treatise which tells his [religious] achievement; (ii) liberation.'<sup>65</sup> To emphasise the fact that these works portray the liberation or accomplishment of a person, one could render the term 'liberation story'; to nuance their historical content 'spiritual biography' is also appropriate and is the rendition chosen for this thesis. The related *rang nam* genre (literally 'one's own liberation [story]') may be translated as 'spiritual memoir'. The mere use of 'biography' or 'autobiography' overlooks the primary function of the genre.<sup>66</sup>

Previous scholars have interpreted and used texts of this genre in various ways.<sup>67</sup> While critiques are meaningful and necessary, a too one-sided interpretation may distort comprehension of the *nam thar* genre. When employing the genre for research, one must be aware of the cultural standards of the civilization of its origin and view it primarily as a religious

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<sup>63</sup> Roberts (2007: 3–5) points out that in *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, V. 103, the term is used to indicate a part of the *Gaṇḍhavyūhasūtra*. Some actual *nam thar* texts were probably patterned after Indian examples of spiritual biography, for instance *avādāna* ('presentation of an accomplishment') and *jātaka* ('stories of the previous rebirths' of the Buddha).

<sup>64</sup> Smith (2001: 273, n. 2). A noun form of *vi-mokṣ*, A. 'to wish to free oneself, to free one's self from', also related to *vi-muc*, 'to unloose, to unharness' (Monier Williams 1996). Tibetans mechanically rendered the prefix *vi* with the prefix *nam pa* and *mokṣa* with *thar p/ba*, hence: *nam par thar ba*, transformed into *nam par thar pa* and then abbreviated to *nam thar*.

<sup>65</sup> Zhang Yisun: *nam thar* – 1. *skyes bu dam pa'i mdzad spyod lo rgyus kyi gzhung ngam/rtoḡs pa brjod pa'i bstan bcos*/ 2. *mam grol*. A related genre, *rtoḡs brjod* (Skt. *avādāna*), literally means 'presentation of an accomplishment'.

<sup>66</sup> Although the subject of the work is the life of a Buddhist master and contains some historical information, the title and its primary content is to tell the story of a person's spiritual development and not to give historical detail about his career or motives. That rather implies 'liberation', not 'biography' (see also Ruegg 1966: 66). Dargyay (1994: 99) uses 'features of liberation'. For a study of English biographies, see for example Pritchard (2005).

<sup>67</sup> Gyatso (1998: 107–109) tends to see *rang nam* as more closely related to the Western genre of autobiography in that postmodern theories of the self can be usefully applied to its study. Schuh and Schwieger (1985: XXIXf.) have focused on the writers hidden motives: for example favouritism towards their own tradition and particularly their own monastery.

narrative.<sup>68</sup> Willis has further argued that a major function is not only to inspire the reader but also impart exoteric and esoteric instruction. She has interpreted the sometimes used outer, inner, and secret (*phyi*, *nang*, and *gsang*) levels of *nam thar* as: (i) the 'historical,' (ii) the 'inspirational', and (iii) the 'instructional' dimension.<sup>69</sup> Those sources used in this thesis are mainly belonging to the outer level; the spiritual memoirs can also be regarded as inner. Smith had already succinctly summarised the genre's main characteristics in 1969:

The *nam thar* genre [is] a type of literature that the non-Tibetan will equate with biography or hagiography. Yet while there is often much in a *nam thar* that is of biographical nature, a *nam thar* has for the Buddhist a considerably greater significance. (...) The *nam thar* is ultimately a practical instruction, a guide to the experience, insights, and vision of one developed being.<sup>70</sup>

Spiritual biographies thus have more functions than narrating the life of a saint: they act as role model and instruction for Buddhist practitioners.<sup>71</sup> But who are the role models a Tibetan medieval saint is meant to emulate? Tiso elaborates on three types of Buddhist roles intended to inspire: (i) the *arhat* in the Theravāda tradition, (ii) the bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna, and (iii) the *mahāsiddha* in the Vajrayāna. In Tibet, which produced an exceptional number of these texts, the ideal projected on some early bKa' brgyud pa masters such as Marpa was the third: the tantric saint, the 'great accomplished one' or *mahāsiddha*.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Such an evaluation is suggested by Robinson regarding the *nam thar* of great Indian adepts, arguing they should be read as hagiography, not as biography (Robinson 1996: 64). The opposite approach would be a sentimental and naïve manner of approaching a text.

<sup>69</sup> Willis (1995: 5). This interpretation is useful, though it may have to be adapted to various types of *nam thar*. Templeman (2003: 141) argues that understanding the genre as inspirational has become commonplace. He asserts that his contribution, viewing the genre as an actual instruction, would be new knowledge. However, in light of Willis' work published almost ten years earlier, this seems outdated.

<sup>70</sup> Smith (2001: 13), a reprint of a foreword from 1969.

<sup>71</sup> Karma Thinley Rinpoche, a contemporary master of the bKa' brgyud and Sa skya traditions, explains his motives for composing such a work: 'I wish to demonstrate the marvellous example set forth by former masters such as the First Karma Thinleypa, in their spiritual training and work for sentient beings' (Thinley 1997: 1).

<sup>72</sup> According to the bKa' brgyud traditions' 'golden rosary' narratives (*gser phreng*), spiritual biographies reflect the enlightened principle of the tantric Buddha Vajradhara (Tiso 1989: 113ff.). See Roberts (2007), for a study of the evolution of the spiritual biography of Ras chung pa. For sources on the life of Marpa, see Martin (1984); for a detailed—albeit controversial—discussion of his life vis-à-vis the roles projected upon him by the tradition, see Davidson (2004: 141–148).

Additionally, following the introduction of incarnation as a model of spiritual succession and the monasticisation of lay tantric lineages, the dimension of the reincarnate monk is often added to narratives of incarnate lamas like the Karmapa, depicting the 'abstract role of an incarnate lamaist priest'.<sup>73</sup> The Karmapas are supposed to mirror all three levels of the perceived levels of the Buddha's teaching.<sup>74</sup>

Given the information presented, this thesis presumes spiritual biographies to have a multi-dimensional function, encapsulating historical record and religious instruction, and acting as a vehicle for cultural and religious identity.

When using spiritual biographies as academic sources, it is important to analyse their content with regard to narrative function. Though in this thesis it is considered admissible to use the 'filter method', i.e. to 'filter' historical facts from the text, whether information can be taken at face value depends on each source and the function of particular events in the story.<sup>75</sup> If there is a significant chronological gap, the narratives may conceivably tell us more about the ideas prevalent at the author's time than the historical facts of the protagonist. It has been shown, for example, that elements of Ras chung pa's and Mi la ras pa's spiritual biographies emerge from inventive story telling, but also that *nam thar* usually develop from earlier realism to later idealisation.<sup>76</sup>

Detailed study of the principal sources used in depicting the Eighth Karmapa's life determines the most reliable and early works and investigates their content and intertextuality. As well as preparing the way for the ensuing chapters, this will facilitate work for future researchers, as most sources have not been previously used.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Schuh and Schwieger (1985: XXIX).

<sup>74</sup> Jampa Thaye in his preface to *History of the Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet* (Thinley 1980: 21–38). The function of visions and miracles is also described. The three levels of Buddhist teaching are reflected in the three vow theories which developed to a considerable level in Tibet (see Sobisch: 2002a).

<sup>75</sup> A term used by Mills in an address to the Tibetologists present at the International Association for Tibetan Studies Conference, Bonn, August 2006.

<sup>76</sup> Roberts (2007) has undertaken an extensive comparative study of various versions of Ras chung pa's spiritual biography, which span several centuries. One example is the story of the yak horn (ibid. 183–210).

<sup>77</sup> In order to assess a clear timeline of the events in the Eighth Karmapa's life, all colophons of his written works are used. For an exhaustive study of the Eighth Karmapa's life, one should also take into account works such as the spiritual songs (*mgur*), along with some letters to leading political figures. Here, only the spiritual biographies are used.

(a) *Spiritual Memoirs by the Eighth Karmapa*

Nine sources attribute their authorship to the Eighth Karmapa.

(i) *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar legs spyad mar grags pa rje nyid kyis mdzad pa* (4 fols) is a short text composed in verse.<sup>78</sup> In the beginning, the Karmapa states he has written on his experiences at some students' request; specified in the interlinear commentary (*mchan*) to be 'Bri gung Rin po che and Paṇ chen rDor rgyal ba.<sup>79</sup> The work is an instruction with philosophical and motivational content; dates and information regarding events in his life are completely absent. A text designed as a commentary ('*grel pa*) to this work is one of the significant spiritual biographies by his early students (examined below).

(ii) *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar la bslab pa'i khrid*<sup>80</sup> (18 fols) is a spiritual memoir designed as an instruction to the Eighth Karmapa's disciples. Though few dates are mentioned, the influence of his teachers is illustrated well. Composed in 1536 (thirtieth year), the Karmapa revised it later, in 1548 (forty-second year). The work is an outline of the Karmapa's practice steps, experiences, and reliance on his four great teachers (*rje btsun chen po bzhi*).<sup>81</sup> He explains that it is rare to meet a qualified teacher and that false teachers abound, concluding by saying that authentic teachers do not place liberation in the student's hand, but that one should see the teacher's qualities and emulate his practice.<sup>82</sup>

(iii) *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar rje nyid kyis nram thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa*<sup>83</sup> (7 fols) is a short account in verse composed in his twenty-eighth year (1534) in rNam thos kyi ri bo. It details the main phases of the Karmapa's life from his perspective, occasionally providing dates. It is crucial in that it exposes some of the motivations and feelings of the Karmapa himself.

(iv) *rJe mi bskyod rdo rje'i 'phral gyi nram thar tshigs su bcad pa nyer bdun pa rje nyid kyis mdzad pa*<sup>84</sup> (3 fols) comprises twenty-seven verses of

<sup>78</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 107–114. Though full references are to be found in the bibliography, they are given here for easier access.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 1a (p. 108).

<sup>80</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 115–149.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 3a (p. 119).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 17b (p. 148).

<sup>83</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 331–343. Title variants *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar rje nyid kyis nram thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa* and from the *dKar chag*: *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar (...)*.

<sup>84</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 344–349.



motivational teachings, and could be considered a 'song of experience' (*nyams mgur*). It was composed in the Karmapa's thirty-third year (1539) at mTshur phu.

(v) *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*<sup>85</sup> (19 fols) begins with an autobiographical summary of the Karmapa's life up to his fortieth year (1546). Therein he briefly describes how he attended his teachers and lists his compositions. This list is a valuable resource (next to the *dKar chag*) for determining the content and authenticity of the Eighth Karmapa's writings and is used throughout the thesis.

(vi) *gDul bya phyi ma la gdams pa'i rnam par thar pa*<sup>86</sup> (16 fols) is a part of the Karmapa's spiritual biography taught to his students. It contains autobiographical elements and mainly describes his spiritual development. The word 'instruction' (*gdams pa*) in the title indicates the work was designed as such; consequently, it found entry in the 'advice' (*bslab bya*) section of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.

(vii) *Nyid bstod kyi rang 'grel*<sup>87</sup> (5 fols) is a peculiar work: a commentary by the Eighth Karmapa on a 'self praise' (*nyid bstod*) also attributed to the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>88</sup> It considers Buddhist tantra and philosophy.

(viii) *rGyal ba karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar bdag tshul bcu gnyis*<sup>89</sup> (10 fols) is a spiritual memoir written in 1527 in Kong po. The Karmapa's story is therein fashioned after the ideal of the twelve deeds of the Buddha. The Karmapa's sojourn in the pure land of Maitreya is depicted, a mystic place where he is supposed to have dwelt before his birth. It contains descriptions of various Buddhist practices undertaken by the Karmapa, and laments the degenerate nature of disciples and teachers in Central Asia during this period.

(ix) *Chos kyi rje 'jigs rten dbang po dpal karma pa brgyad pa'i zhabs kyi mtshan rab tu brjod pa rje nyid kyi mdzad pa*<sup>90</sup> (3 fols) explains the meaning of the Eighth Karmapa's full name. The mentioning of the names

<sup>85</sup> The full title being: *Byang phyogs 'di na karma pa/rim par byon las bdun pa rang byung ni/ /kun mkhyen chos rje'i slob mar gyur 'ga' yi' /bka' 'bangs mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 350–387.

<sup>86</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 3, pp. 519–549.

<sup>87</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 430–438.

<sup>88</sup> This is clearly stated in the beginning of the text. The more elaborate title of the self praise is *Tshigs su bcad pa blza med mar 'bod pa* (ibid. fol 1b: *bdag nyid la gdag nyid kyi bstod pa byas pa'i tshigs su bcad pa blza med mar 'bod pa de nyid kyi tshig don dgrol bar bya/*).

<sup>89</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 488–507.

<sup>90</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 388–392.

is also a benefit of this text: 'Glorious Fame Accomplishing the teaching, Victorious in all Directions at all Times in Manifold [Ways], Unmovable Good One, [and] Melodious Sound of Adamantine (*vajra*) Joy.'<sup>91</sup> The text is an example of the creative and poetic methods by which the author relates each element of the names to various doctrinal concepts and qualities of Buddhism. The text has a commentary by dPa bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba which is described below.

(x) *dPal ldan mi bskyod rdo rje'i gsang ba'i mam thar chu zla'i snang brnyan* 1 fol., is a very short secret spiritual biography not attested in any title lists to date. It was requested by a sGam po mKhan po, who also authored a spiritual biography that has only come to light recently (see the following section (b) no. vi below). It is contained in a highly interesting manuscript collection that my colleague Thrinle Tulku Rinpoche (Paris) had discovered at KIBI, New Delhi (working title hereafter: *Delhi Ms*) and kindly shared with me.<sup>92</sup> The brief verse-like text is found on fol. 5b-6a (pp. 283–284) of the volume with the margin *ga*. The content is mostly about visions, dreams, and spiritual experiences. A more elaborate description of this corpus will be found in my forthcoming work about Mi bskyod rdo rje's writings.

### (b) *Spiritual Biographies by Direct Students of the Eighth Karmapa*

The first three texts (i–iii) are the earliest, most extensive, and historically significant primary sources for the study of the Karmapa's life. Additionally, the spiritual biography composed by Sangs rgyas dpal grub (ii) contains a hint about two important sources unfortunately still missing. Accurate historical research has to be based on these three accounts, combined with the spiritual memoirs presented earlier.

(i) *rGyal ba kun gyu dbang po dpal ldan karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i zhabs kyi dgung lo bdun phan gyi rnam par thar pa nor bu'i phreng ba*, (37 fols) by dGe slong Byang chub bzang po alias A khu a khra, contains the most detailed account of the Karmapa's early years. Its author, Byang chub bzang po (more famously known as A khu a khra), was an attendant of the Eighth Karmapa. He met the then seven-month-old Karmapa in 1508,

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. fol. 1b (p. 389): *dpal ldan chos grub grags pa phyogs thams cad la dus kun tu sna tshogs par rnam par rgyal ba mi bskyod bzang po rdo rje dga' ba'i dbyang*. In the English translation, the beginning of a discernible subname is capitalised for easier comprehension, though the subnames can be determined in various ways (ibid. fol. 2b/p. 391).

<sup>92</sup> I would like to thank Thrinle Rinpoche for his help.

attending him until shortly before completion of his eighth year (1514).<sup>93</sup> He indicates in the colophon that he was a student of the Seventh Karmapa, Chos grags rgya mtsho. He was likely an administrator under the Seventh Karmapa<sup>94</sup>, and compiled a collection of meditation instructions of the *Ras chung snyan rgyud*.<sup>95</sup> The colophon further mentions that he noted several miraculous events, which he witnessed and affirms the authenticity of the events depicted.

Since an attendant of the Karmapa authored this spiritual biography, one can assume its author was close to him. Further, it is clear that the Karmapa himself was familiar with, or at least aware of, this source: in a spiritual memoir the Eighth Karmapa composed in his fortieth year (1546), he writes: 'The spiritual biography up to [my] seventh year, arranged by the monk (*dge slong*) Byang chub bzang po.'<sup>96</sup>

This work became the primary source on the Karmapa's early years for later biographers. dPa' bo rin po che, too young to witness the events, remarks that he had summarised A khu a khra's work for depicting the Karmapa's early years in his own work (see below).<sup>97</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, author of the next source, also mentions that he used A khu a khra's account. At times Sangs rgyas dpal grub and dPa' bo rin po che added different perspectives to the events. A more detailed analysis of A khu a khra's work can be found in Chapter Five, where four teaching dialogues embedded within the text will be examined.

<sup>93</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 36b (p. 104): *zhes pa 'di ni dge slong byang chub bzang po bya ba ming gzhan a khu a khra grags pa/ yang dag pa'i rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas karma pa chos grags rgya mtsho las bka' drin cung zad mnos pa'i rten 'brel gyis/ sprul pa'i sku 'di yang dgung zla bdun bzhes nas mjal/ dgung lo bgryad du ma longs kyi bar zhabs pad bsten nas ngo mtshar gyi mdzad pa kha shas mthong ba kun zin bris byas par 'dug/*. While this colophon talks about 'until [his] eighth year was not reached', the title used the wording 'up to the seventh year' (*dgung lo bdun pa*) of the Karmapa (being 1513/14).

<sup>94</sup> dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba called him *dpon chen* of the Seventh Karmapa, literally meaning 'great lord' but here probably indicating 'great administrator' (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1225).

<sup>95</sup> The work he compiled is Byang chub bzang po, A khu a khra, *bDe mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud*.

<sup>96</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 5a (p. 358): *dge slong byang chub bzang pos dgung lo bdun yan gyi mam thar bsgrigs pa/*.

<sup>97</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1225: *de ltar gzhon nu rol rtsed kyi nram thar cung zad tsam dge slong byang chub bzang po zhes bya ba drung gong ma'i dpon chen a khu a khra zhes grags pa des bsgrigs pa'i nram thar las bsdu pa yin la 'di pyin gyi mdzad pa sa bon tsam nyid la nyid kyis bstod pa dang sbyar te brjo par bya'ol/*.

(ii) *rGyal ba spyan ras gzigs dbang brgyad pa' nram thar legs spyad ma'i don 'grel gsal ba'i sgron me* (90 fols), by Sangs rgyas dpal grub, is an extensive spiritual biography by a student of the Eighth Karmapa, containing lengthy doctrinal discussions. The text is designed as 'commentary' on the Karmapa's spiritual memoir (i), listed above (*Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar legs spyad mar grags pa rje nyid kyis mdzad pa*).<sup>98</sup> According to the colophon, the author attended the Karmapa from his thirty-third year on (1539).<sup>99</sup> Thus, the text was composed some time proceeding that year. Sangs rgyas dpal grub was appointed by the Eighth Karmapa as a lama somewhere in gTsang and is also found requesting a brief Great Seal commentary.<sup>100</sup>

The outline shows that this spiritual biography is designed as a pedagogical tool. In the statement of purpose, Sangs rgyas dpal grub explains that the work seeks to inspire faith in students and in those who 'have the eye of wisdom', so that when seeing or hearing this spiritual biography they would want to learn and emulate it.<sup>101</sup> To that end, events in the Karmapa's life are subsumed under topics such as the deeds of the bodhisattva (e.g. the six *pāramitās*), and are consequently not ordered chronologically. Often the reflective remarks are inserted about the bad times and boastful teachers around 'these days' (*deng sang*).<sup>102</sup> However, on the closing pages where the author details his sources, some interesting information is offered. Again, mention is found of A khu a khra's account of the Eighth Karmapa's early years, but the author then mentions two more texts, presently unavailable: a spiritual biography composed by Grub pa'i dbang phyug sGam po Khan po Śākya dge slong bzang po, and one authored by Bla ma dPon yig.<sup>103</sup> The *nram thar* authored by a sGam po Khan po Śākya dge slong bzang po has recently surfaced and is briefly described below (no. vi).

<sup>98</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 90b/p. 329: *karma pa brgyad pa legs spyad ma'i grel pa*.

<sup>99</sup> This date is confirmed by *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 341.

<sup>100</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 346. He requested the notes (*zin bris*) of the Eighth Karmapa's *rGya gar gyi phyag chen ngon byung dwags brgyud kyi sgros kyis rgyan pa*.

<sup>101</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 3b (p. 155).

<sup>102</sup> For example Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 22a, p. 192.

<sup>103</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 83b (p. 315): *zhes a khu a kras pa bsgrigs pa'i nram thar dang grub pa'i dbang phyug sgam po khan po śākya dge slong bzang pos mdzad pa'i nram thar dang bla ma dpon yig gis mdzad pa'i nram thar dang drung nyid gsungs pa'i nram thar yin pa nams nang nas khungs dag re re*.

Some passages<sup>104</sup> are more extensive than in dPa' bo's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, though they use similar wording. The intertextuality might suggest that Sangs rgyas dpal grub's work is older, or alternatively that here we find remnants of the two missing sources, that may have partly served as templates for other early texts. This quality makes this source very valuable. Yet the full extent of the relationship will remain unclear until the two missing accounts are located and the spiritual biographies can be analysed together in greater detail.

(iii) *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (vol. 2, pp. 1206–1334) by dPa' bo gTsong lag 'phreng ba (1504–1566) contains the longest account about Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje. The passage on the Karmapa is contained in the block-print volume *pa* of this 'history of Buddhism' (*chos 'byung*) which follows a narration strategy similar to that of a spiritual biography. Across various published editions there are no differences in content, with dissimilarities being limited merely to orthography.

The whole of the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, was composed between 1545 and 1565. The spiritual biography of the Eighth Karmapa is found in Chapter Three: the religious history of the Karma bKa' brgyud school. In his colophon, dPa' bo rin po che explains that he was urged by mKhas grub dPal Kir ti śwa ra (Skt. Kīrtiśvara) to compose a spiritual biography and had promised to do so twelve years before. He then completed the spiritual biography of the Eighth Karmapa in a bird year (probably 1561) at the dGa' ldan Ma mo temple in Kong po.<sup>105</sup> gTsong lag 'phreng ba was one of the Karmapa's two principle disciples, and as such his testimony can be regarded as trustworthy, insofar as the genre can be viewed as such.

Looking at the intertextuality of this work and the other major spiritual biographies composed by the Eighth Karmapa's students, it seems that dPa' bo Rin po che took them into account in creating this work; though the other texts can, at times, be more extensive. Nevertheless, of single works treating the whole of the Karmapa's life, dPa' bo's account may be considered the most extensive to date. While sometimes following a chronological order of events, it is divided into different topics such as his youth, his receiving the various levels of vows of Buddhism, his ascetic practices, and his benefiting of others—a structure which again elevates the religious function of the text over the historical.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, the passage describing how the Eighth Karmapa studied with Karma 'phrin las pa (Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 23b f./p. 196).

<sup>105</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* p. 1333–1334.

(iv) *Chos kyi rje 'jigs rten dbang po dpal karma pa brgyad pa'i zhabs kyi mtshan rab tu brjod pa'i 'grel pa*<sup>106</sup> (19 fols) is a commentary by gTsong lag 'phreng ba on the spiritual memoir about the different names of the Eighth Karmapa (a.ix).

(v) *Mi bskyod rdo rje rnam thar tshig bcad ma* (5 fols) and (vi) *rGyal ba mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bstod pa zol med mes pa 'dren byed* (26 fols) are found in the *Selected Writings* (vol. II) of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, another prominent student of the Eighth Karmapa. These are two verse-accounts in which the Zhwa dmar pa praises the deeds of his teacher. They are not extensive, yet constitute an early source on the Eighth Karmapa's life, but without substantial new historical information.

(vi) The secret biography by Khan po Śākya dge slong bzang po has no title and is contained in the recently obtained manuscript collection *Delhi Ms*, fol. 5b–10b (pp. 284–294), margin *ga*.<sup>107</sup> This secret spiritual biography is basically a compilation of various events, mostly in the form of sayings of the Eighth Karmapa, that do not follow a recognisable order. The colophon mentions the compiler sGam po mKhan po Śākya bzang po. It further suggests it is a secret spiritual biography and affirms the nature of representing authentic sayings (*gsung*) of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>108</sup> As such, this interesting text might as well be considered a 'compiled autohagiography' and warrants further study.

### (c) *Spiritual Biographies by Later Tibetan Scholars*

(i) *Kaṃ tshang* contains the most extensive spiritual biography among the numerous later compilations. It is part of the great history of the bKa' brgyud tradition by Si tu Paṇ chen and 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab. The account of the Eighth Karmapa is twenty-five folios long<sup>109</sup> and mainly consists of a summary of dPa' bo gTsong lag 'phreng ba's and other earlier

<sup>106</sup> *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 1, pp. 393–430, 19 fols.

<sup>107</sup> The incipit of this text is: *om bde legs su gyur cig/ ri rab rdul gyis grangs kyiis nral byor ma*. For the circumstances of this text's discovery, see above.

<sup>108</sup> *Delhi Ms*, fol. 10b (p 294): *rje thams cad mkyan pa 'di nyid rnam par thar pa zab cing rgya che ba/ bsam kyi mi khyab pa/ gsang ba bas kyang ches bsang ba 'di nyid/ rje'i gsung las phri bsnan med par sgam po mkhan po shākya bzang pos mkod pa*. 'This omniscient lord himself's very liberation story, profound and vast, inconceivable, and more secret than secret, arranged by sGam po mKhan po Śākya bzang po without subtracting or adding ...'

<sup>109</sup> This refers to the edition published in 1972; in this thesis a reprint from 2004 will be used. The editions differ only in minuscule orthographical variations.

works.<sup>110</sup> *Kaṃ tshang* was completed in 1715, one hundred and sixty-one years after the Eighth Karmapa's death. Nevertheless, at times passages elucidate the cryptic parts of the older sources as events are ordered in a more intelligible and predominantly chronological way. Further, some passages suggest that Si tu Paṇ chen might have had access to the two now unavailable sources.

The other, later compilations listed are often based on the *Kaṃ tshang* of Si tu Paṇ chen, which has become—according to mKhan po Nges don—the standard source for scholars in the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage. One main reason may be that this particular version poses less of a challenge to the reader and is organised more chronologically.<sup>111</sup>

(ii) *Chos rje karma pa sku 'phreng rim byon gyi nram thar mdor bsdu dpag bsam khri shing* by Karma nges don bstan rgyas (nineteenth century) is a compilation of Karmapa biographies from the First to the Fifteenth, written in 1891. It provides a section on the Eighth Karmapa over forty-one pages, consisting of a summary of Si tu Paṇ chen's *Kaṃ tshang*.

(iii) The short account regarding the Eighth Karmapa in the *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 7, pp. 163–184) compiled by mKhas btsun bzang po in 1973, amounts to a review of *Kaṃ tshang* and, as such, adds nothing new. Brief accounts and summaries based on the aforementioned texts can be found in various modern bibliographies of Tibetan scholars, though they are of no independent value.<sup>112</sup>

In summary, the most useful primary sources for depicting the life of the Karmapa are the three spiritual biographies by his students (i–iii) and some spiritual memoirs (mainly ii, iii, and v). It has also been shown that two of the five early sources by his students are still missing.<sup>113</sup> Of the later compilations, the extensive and well-structured *Kaṃ tshang* by Si tu Paṇ chen can be very useful, as it seems to contain remnants of the two lost sources.

<sup>110</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* is sometimes referred to in the text. Concerning the other sources, we can only speculate whether Si tu Paṇ chen had access to them or not. I assume that he had.

<sup>111</sup> Oral communication, February 2005.

<sup>112</sup> 1984: Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang (ed.), *Bod gangs can gyi grub mtha' ris med kyi mkhas dbang brgya dang brgyad cu lhag gi gsung 'bum so so'i dkar chag phyogs gcig to sgrigs pa shes bya'i gter mdzod*, pp. 15–17. 1992: Grags pa 'byung gnas and Blo bzang mkhas grub, *Gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, pp. 27–29. 1997: rGyal mtshan, *Kaṃ tshang yab sras dang spal spungs dgon pa*, pp. 52–57. 1997: lDan ma 'Jam dbyangs tshul khri ms, *dPal karma pa sku 'phreng rim byon gyi mdzad nram*, pp. 158–168. 1999: Mi nyag mgon po, *Gangs can mkhas dbang rim byon gyi nram thar mdor bsdu*, pp. 248–251.

<sup>113</sup> *'Bras spungs dkar chag*, p. 1506 lists an alleged autobiography entitled *rNam thar rin chen 'od 'phreng*. This could, however, not be verified in any of the title lists. As the text is also unavailable, its nature remains doubtful.

In the course of this thesis, the usage of spiritual biographies will be twofold: (i) while remaining aware of the importance of the narrative plots and topoi, conclusions will be drawn about historical facts, on the basis of which the Eighth Karmapa's life and context of his Great Seal teachings can be reconstructed. (ii) In Chapter Five one of these sources (*A khu A khra*) will be treated as instruction and religious narrative. Here, the methodologies from narratology will be partially employed for dialogues revolving around the Great Seal.

This chapter presented and discussed the sources for the study of the Eighth Karmapa, his Great Seal, and his life. It has attempted to come to terms with the origin and textual history of the Karmapa's writings, identifying early title lists which aid the verification of the works ascribed to him. Further, it has shown that a manuscript edition was issued soon after his passing. A survey of missing texts revealed the relevant material to be complete with minor exceptions, and the contribution and origination of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* was investigated and its rubrics outlined. A discussion of genres documenting or consisting of Great Seal teaching concluded that meditation instructions, esoteric precepts, advices, and question and answer texts are key genres for Great Seal teaching in general. In closing, the issues arising when employing spiritual biographies and memoirs as sources and their usage in this thesis was expounded upon, the available writings analysed and the most valuable spiritual biographies and memoirs selected.



## Chapter 4

### The Eighth Karmapa: Scholar, Monk, and Yogi

Apart from [teaching a few suitable individuals], for [those] not striving for the authentic dharma [but] wishing to obtain the dharma of material [wealth] and fame, [I] pleased [this] mass of thoughtless individuals through the idle chatter of fake (*ltar bcos*) empowerment, reading transmission, and meditation instruction (*dbang lung khrid*).<sup>1</sup>

– From a spiritual memoir of the Eighth Karmapa

The boy who would become the Eighth Karmapa did not have an easy childhood: his status as incarnation was disputed and, while his school enjoyed special favours, unrest in dBus set in again after 1517. Yet, he became one of the most important scholars of the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition and a renowned meditation teacher, who exerted political influence in places where his school held large estates. This chapter provides a portrait of his life and spiritual programme, thus laying the foundation for understanding the Eighth Karmapa and his Great Seal in context.

#### 4.1 The Eighth Karmapa's Life

In this summary, crucial events are presented chronologically, with attention paid to historical perspective as far as the sources allow.<sup>2</sup> Issues pertinent to this thesis are analysed more extensively. These are the

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<sup>1</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 6b (p.341): *gzhan du dam chos don du mi gnyer zhing/ /zang zing grags pa'i chos thob 'dod rnam ngor/ /dbang lung khrid ltar bcos pa'i ngag kyal gyis/ bsam med skye bo'i tshogs rnam mgu bar byas/*.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Three (3.3, 3.4), for how the sources are used. For a detailed account of the early years of Mi bskyod rdo rje with an emphasis on the dispute about the incarnation, see also Jim Rheingans 'Narratives of Reincarnation, Politics of Power, and the Emergence of a Scholar: the Very Early Years of Mi bskyod rdo rje and its Sources', in *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined: Biography in the Buddhist Traditions*, edited by Linda Covill, Ulrike Roesler, and Sarah Shaw (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), 241–299.

formative years of the Eighth Karmapa's evolution into a scholar and mystic teacher: his childhood and the dispute about the incarnation; his education; his practice of the Great Seal and some scholastic contributions and political involvements. The later part of the Karmapa's religious career is treated in abbreviated manner.

#### 4.1.1 Birth and Early Childhood (1507–1508)

Most narratives initially outline various pre-birth events and establish the Eighth Karmapa's continuity with his predecessor, the Seventh Karmapa Chos grags rgya mtsho through a quote attributed to him: 'I am unborn and yet show birth, I *do not abide* and yet show abiding, there is no death and yet I show dying; and again, though there is no birth, I show [re]birth.'<sup>3</sup> The infant who would later become Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje was born on the fourth day of the eleventh month of the fire hare year (1507) in Eastern Tibet in today's Chab mdo prefecture, close to the Ngom chu river.<sup>4</sup> The area was called Kar ti phug in a village called Sa tam. To the north laid the main Karma bKa' brgyud seat in Eastern Tibet, Karma dgon. To the south-west, the sTag lung bKa' brgyud seat Ri bo che.<sup>5</sup> The future Karmapa's

<sup>3</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 5a/p. 41: *bdag ni skye ba med la skye tshul ston/ /gnas pa med la gnas tshul ston/ /'chi ba med la 'chi ba'i tshul ston/ /slar yang skye ba med la skye tshul bstan/*). *A khu A khra*, fol. 1b ff. (p. 2ff.), starts out by outlining the Karmapa's former incarnations as great masters of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (pp. 32–42) after he had brought forth *bodhicitta* in the presence of the Buddha rGyal ba seng ge na ro. Before the narration of the actual birth, most narratives expound on the qualities of the Karmapa's parents. For the prebirth stories and the nature of the parents see *A khu A khra*, fol. 2a–5b (pp. 4–10); Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 1a–7a (2–14); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1206–1209 and *Kam tshang*, p. 299–302. The latter *Kam tshang* has been translated in excellent manner into German by Verhufen (1995: 75–79).

<sup>4</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 9b (p. 50) simply states 'eleventh month' (*zla ba bcu gcig pa*). *Kam tshang*, p. 302, has the fourth day of the eleventh *hor* month as the Karmapa's birthday. If one were to transpose this information, it is likely the seventh of December 1507. We can assume – with good reason – that these dates are given according to the mTshur phu astrological tradition used by scholars of the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition, where the eleventh *hor* month is the first (lunar) winter month; in this cycle it would also hold true for the Phug pa calculation (see Schuh 1973 and Vogel 1964: 225–226, for the Tibetan calendar and the sexagenary cycle; see Henning 2007: 337–339, for the Kālacakra and the mTshur phu tradition). According to Schuh's calculation (1973: 123 of the table), the Kālacakra *byed rtsis* (which, to some extent forms the basis of the mTshur phu calculations), the eleventh month start with the 4.12.1507 of our calendar, which makes the fourth day of this month the 7.12.1507.

<sup>5</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 300; Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 1b (p. 351). For the area, see also Dorje (1999: 395–397).

father was gSer Bya bral Byams pa bshes gnyen, occasionally abbreviated 'A Byams pa'; his mother was Bla ma sgron, a wife from the lDong clan, also called 'dBon mo Bla ma sgron'.<sup>6</sup>

Following the style of spiritual biographies, immediately after his birth the Karmapa is said to have rolled his eyes back and to have uttered 'I am the Karmapa'.<sup>7</sup> When news spread of the birth of a special boy, the Karma Si tu pa, whose main seat was Karma dgon, decided to examine the case after just seven days.<sup>8</sup> The Seventh Karmapa had apparently left letters regarding his rebirth for the rGyal tshab Rin po che and Si tu Rin po che respectively.<sup>9</sup> In Si tu pa's prediction letter, the future Karmapa's parents were named 'Byams pa' and 'Bla ma mtsho'. However, these did not accord precisely with those of the boy's parents (A byams pa/Byams pa bshes gnyen, Bla ma sgron). Therefore, Si tu pa decided to test the matter.<sup>10</sup>

First, Si tu pa told the parents to keep the special nature of the boy secret for three months and gave them various presents for the boy, including a silk scarf and ritual pills (*rten 'dus ril bu*). He said to the infant Karmapa: 'I will bring you clothes and invite you for tea [later].'<sup>11</sup> He then instructed them to serve the pills and burn incense. Upon doing so, if the boy would be the incarnation, nothing would happen. If not, he would show signs the

<sup>6</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 5b (p. 42). According to his spiritual memoir (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 1b/p. 251) the father was gSer Bya bral Byams pa bshes gnyen and the mother is called Bla ma sgron, identified with an attendant of Birwapa, when he was invited by the Chinese emperor. The father had apparently received Great Seal teachings from the Seventh Karmapa and descended from the patrilineage (*gdungs*) of the nine generals of the time of the Sa skya hierarch 'Gro dgon 'phags pa (1235–1280) (ibid. fol. 1b/p.251). As the boy is sometimes (ibid. fol. 13a /p. 57) called "Son of lDag li" (*ldag li'i bu*) or "Father and Son Lho rong Nang so pa" (*lho rong nang so yab sras*), these two names of the Karmapa's father may be added.

<sup>7</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 9b (p. 50), mentions that he has uttered this phrase three times, whereas *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (p. 1212) wrote he said it twice. According to his spiritual memoir the Karmapa said: 'om ma ñi pad me hum', 'Karmapa, Karmapa' and 'a, ā, i, ī' (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 1b/p. 351).

<sup>8</sup> There seems to be some confusion about the dates of the Si tu pa: Richardson (1980: 377) gives the dates of Si tu II bKra shis mam rgyal (1450–1497) and Si tu III bKra shis dpal 'byor (1498–1541). But *A khu A khra*, fol. 18b (p. 68), and Zhang Yisun assert that the Karma Si tu pa passed away in 1512. Furthermore, c.1516, the Eighth Karmapa recognised the incarnation of Si tu bKra shis dpal 'byor and gave him the name Chos kyi 'od zer (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1234). It would follow that the Si tu at hand here is the third Si tu bKra shis dpal 'byor. That means he would have had to die in 1512 and been reborn before 1516.

<sup>9</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1207.

<sup>10</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 10a (p. 51).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. fol. 10a (p. 51): *'karma si tu bas khyod la na bza' ja 'dren dang bcas pa bskur yod zhus la/*.

next day. If he were to say verses in the evening, it would be maximum four phrases (*tshig*) and minimum three; then the parents should come to him. The father did accordingly and said: 'If you are the rebirth of the Karmapa, Karma Si tu pa will bring you clothes and invite you for tea; therefore clothes and tea invitation are marginal and can be left for later!' The boy replied: 'E ma ho! Do not harbour doubts about me; I am [the one] called the Karmapa.'<sup>12</sup>

At three months old, the boy was invited by the masters of Ri bo che, Ri bo che Chos rje and the Lho rong sDe pa (the ruler of Lho rong, sometimes called Lho rong Go shri) to Lho rong.<sup>13</sup> At the age of seven months, it is recounted that he gave blessings to a large assembly near Ri bo che.<sup>14</sup>

Around 1508, the mTshur phu rGyal tshab bKra shis rnam rgyal (1490–1518) (rGyal tshab Rin po che) received news about the signs of the rebirth of the Karmapa, in the area of the Ngom river from a Bla ma bSod nams rgyal mtshan, in conjunction with the rising sun shining on his tent and his first tea. This was considered auspicious by the rGyal tshab Rin po che.<sup>15</sup> However, he also received news about another possible candidate: a boy staying in Kong po.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. fol. 10a–b (p. 51–52): *khyed karma pa'i sku skye yin na/ karma si tu bas khyed la na bza' ja 'dren dang bcas pa bskur byas pas/ na* [fol. 10b] *bza' ja 'dren yang zur 'phyis gsung nas/ e ma ho/ nga la the tshom ma byed dang/ nga ni karma pa zhes bya/ zhes gsungs/*. The translation for *zur 'phyis* is free, as a spelling error is suspected. The meaning used was supported by mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, March 2007). Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 8a (p. 164), adds that the event took place nine days after the birth on the thirteenth day of the month. Later tradition considered the whole event important; Thinley (1980: 89) reports comparatively extensively on it (one assumes he used the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* for this passage). Following this, the spiritual biographies relate events in support of the boy being the re-embodiment of the Seventh Karmapa, such as recognising students and ritual implements from his past life and showing signs of remarkable spiritual abilities (*A khu A khra*, fol. 17b/p. 66).

<sup>13</sup> It is not entirely clear from the sources whether he actually went to the places of Ri bo che and Lho rong respectively, or whether these two persons invited him while being in another place. Ri bo che, however, is quite close to the area of his birth: the temple of Ri bo che was founded in 1246 by Sangs rgyas 'on, third lineage holder and abbot of the sTag lung branch of the bKa' bryud school (Dorje 1999: 391). The area, and the town of Lho rong, is south-east of the Karmapa's birth place in Ngom, and further south than Ri bo che (ibid. 403).

<sup>14</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 12b (p. 56).

<sup>15</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 13a (p. 57); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1215. In Tibetan culture, the interpretation of events as auspicious or inauspicious (*rten 'brel*) is a widely accepted practice rooted in pre-Buddhist beliefs (Samuel 1993: 176; Tucci 1980: 202; for the role of dreams, see Wayman 1967). In the spiritual biographies, the interpretation of dreams and various kinds of divination play key roles in identifying the Karmapa. Verhufen (1995: 50) points out the importance of visions as transmission in the Eighth Karmapa's spiritual biography.

### 4.1.2 *The Dispute about the Incarnation (1508–1513)*

The story which unfolds from the proclamation of the rival candidate illustrates some of the religio-political concerns in determining an incarnation, and was likely a decisive factor in the Eighth Karmapa's development.<sup>16</sup> The boy proclaimed Karmapa-candidate was the son of a Bla ma A mdo ba, residing in Kong po Brags gsum (south-west of Lhasa). At this time, the Karma encampment (*sgar*), the movable tent village of the previous Karmapa, was probably pitched in the area of Kong po.<sup>17</sup> dPa' bo rin po che recounts that as the Bla ma A mdo ba had offered those residing in the encampment food and beer (*chang*), they became partial towards the view that his son was the Karmapa.<sup>18</sup>

The rGyal tshab Rin po che quickly went to Kong po Brag gsum, having had dreams of the worldly behaviour of the residents in his encampment, and met the other candidate. When the candidate returned all three gifts to him, the rGyal tshab Rin po che considered this a bad omen. In a dream afterwards, he saw the west as black and east (the Karmapa's birth place) as bright.<sup>19</sup>

While the matter seemed clear to the rGyal tshab Rin po che, the path to the resolution of this matter and the enthronement of the Eighth Karmapa would be a long one. Sources indicate the rival candidate's party had the political support of the Phag mo gru pa regents (such as Ngag dbang bKra

<sup>16</sup> Verhufen (1995: 80) did not present this dispute in detail as he based himself on the highly abbreviated version in *Kam tshang*, pp. 304–305. Verhufen (1995: 96, n. 59) has noted, however, two brief sentences in Stein (1972: 147, he had employed the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* as source) who indicate the conflicting situation.

<sup>17</sup> From the time of the Seventh Karmapa, Chos grags rgya mtsho, the encampment became more permanent and was occasionally called mTshur phu sgar. The camp moved periodically in a nomadic way (oral communication mKhan po Nges don; Thinley 1980: 90; Jackson, D. 1996: 167). The Tibetan *sgar pa* can also refer to the inhabitants of the encampment, consisting of monks and lamas, as well as lay-people acting as guards for the religious hierarchs (Snellgrove and Richardson 1968: 137).

<sup>18</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1216. dPa' bo's account of the two incarnations is, in general, more bitter in this matter. He says, for example, that Bla ma A mdo ba was wild.

<sup>19</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 13bf. (p. 58f.); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1216. Previously, while in a retreat in sNye bo sa phug, the rGyal tshab Rin po che had dreamt of a similar scenario: at the right side of a tiger there was a lion who could not roar and the tiger was also unable to roar. While contemplating the nature of the voice of the tiger if the lord of all wild animals, the lion, has no voice, from the left a dragon's roar pervaded all directions. After the roar sounded, the lion became a white dog and vanished. When, later that day he examined the dream, he concluded that the tiger was him, the lion the western incarnation and the dragon the eastern. He related this to Bla ma gCod pa from Rong po (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1216; *A khu A khra*, fol. 14a/p. 59).

shis grags pa, 1488–1564) and their priests (*yon mchod*), the rGyal tshab Rin po che and mTshur pu monks, and what is more, the powerful Rin spungs pa general, Don yod rdo rje. Thus, the most powerful and wealthy patrons along with the encampment lamas and monks had become partial to the western candidate.<sup>20</sup> As the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa had relations with both the conflicting Phag mo gru and Rin spungs pa parties<sup>21</sup>, it is important to briefly survey his role in the process of determining the Karmapa.

A passage in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* indicates the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, when asked whether he would invite the boy from Kong po brag gsum for tea, declined and mentioned to those in the encampment that the incarnation from the east would be undisputed.<sup>22</sup> Still, it appears he assumed a relatively low-key role in the recognition process: he had not met the young Karmapa, and consequently did not act as his principal tutor. This is surprising, as the Zhwa dmar pa had been the main lineage holder after the passing of the Seventh Karmapa, and was a respected spiritual teacher with significant political influence. Yet it might have been precisely this that hindered him in fulfilling his role as the Karmapa's instructor.<sup>23</sup>

Examining how the sources explain this fact, one uncovers the intricate religio-political situation the hierarchs were engulfed in. dPa' bo Rin po che explains: the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa would have been a suitable teacher for the Karmapa, but first he could not go to mDo kham, and later the conditions (*rten 'brel*) of his meeting the Karmapa did not materialise.<sup>24</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub adds that mDo khams and dBus gtsang were separated by a great distance. And it is said the Karmapa received various letters from the Zhwa dmar pa.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 10a (p. 168). Sangs rgyas dpal grub is the only source explicitly mentioning this political support. Interestingly, here the rGyal tshab Rin po che (including the monks from mTshur phu in the sGar) is also depicted as supporting the western candidate. This is likely to mean that, as the main lords of Tibet and all the monks in his camp supported the rival candidate, he had to put on a show.

<sup>21</sup> Ehrhard (2010: 219–221); see also Chapter Two (2.2).

<sup>22</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1219.

<sup>23</sup> A current doctoral research by Kamilla Mojzes 'The Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Incarnate: A Comprehensive Study of the Life and Works of Chos grags ye shes dpal bzang po (1453–1524)' (University of Bonn) will certainly shed more light on the related issues.

<sup>24</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232.

<sup>25</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 13a (p. 194). The *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* contain a song praising the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Mon sha 'ug stag sgo dom tshang ngur mo rong du gsungs pa'i mgur*).

However, usually distances did not matter to Tibetans, not to mention great hierarchs such as the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, who commonly spent their entire lives travelling in Tibet, China, and Mongolia.<sup>26</sup> Thus, one may wish to speculate as to another possibility. The Zhwa dmar pa's (and the Karma bKa' brgyud's) main patron, and most powerful figure in Tibet at the time, Don yod rdo rje, supported the western candidate. Given this fact, it would not have been wise to publicly oppose him. Was it mere coincidence that the Eighth Karmapa was only enthroned in 1513 (see note 28, he arrived in 1513), after Don yod rdo rje passed away?<sup>27</sup>

At some point, the western candidate was invited into the encampment from Kong po brag gsum. The future Karmapa, however, continued travelling to various places in Eastern Tibet, such as Lho rong and Ri bo che, where he inspired the local people and monks and gained their loyal support.<sup>28</sup> Yet, at this point, Sangs rgyas dpal grub evokes an intense image which may be considered a crucial moment in the Eighth Karmapa's life, in spite of the eulogical undertones peculiar to spiritual biographies.<sup>29</sup> The supporters (e.g. the people from Ri bo che and Lho rong) of the future Karmapa were poor, and when he fell ill could not even provide him with medicine. The boy contemplated sadly that in these days having the name of an 'incarnation' (*sprul sku*) would be of no benefit for the next life, and it would also seem that, in this life, there was no control over food or clothing.

He found it unnecessary to have the name of an incarnation and was delighted about not having it. The boy thus resolved that the only thing that mattered was to seek out a qualified teacher and to determine what the true dharma was and what not, feeling joy in contemplating what fortune it

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<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Fourth Zhwa mar pa died in 1524, and thus had seventeen years to travel to mDo khams and meet the young Karmapa. Previously, he had travelled widely and visited his seat in dGa' ldan ma mo in Kong po (Ehrhard 2002a: 15).

<sup>27</sup> The reason behind his inability to come to mDo khams and meet the Karmapa is not entirely clear. A passage in the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa's spiritual biography in *Kaṃ tshang*, pp. 223–224, indicates that the encampment monks apparently did not wish for the Karmapa to go.

<sup>28</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i mam thar*, fol. 2b (p. 333), explains that he stayed (due to the issue of the other candidate) in the area around Lho rong until he was six years old. From the sources it is evident that the Karmapa travelled around and that the other candidate stayed in the camp in Kong po brag gsum when the Karmapa finally arrived in 1513 (see below).

<sup>29</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 10a (p. 168). Although the narratives aim to portray the Karmapa as a Buddha, the difficulties surrounding the incarnation were certainly a historical reality and must have had a considerable impact on the child.

would be to know the Buddhist teachings.<sup>30</sup> The event is rounded off with the narrative of an ascetic, a student of the previous Seventh Karmapa, who performed a divination (*pra phab*) with the aid of Mahākāla. He received a prophecy that all beings would honour and have confidence in this young boy as the Karmapa.<sup>31</sup>

The spiritual biographies portray the future Karmapa's abilities with the often employed topoi of recognising ritual implements such as hats, rosaries, and statues from his predecessors. At the age of nine months (1508) he was invited to the Nam mkha' mdzod temple in Lho rong rDzong gsar.<sup>32</sup> In his third year (1509) he met dBon po dGa' ba and when he was four (1510), on his way to Ri bo che, he encountered Ki nog Bla ma bSod nams rin chen. Ki nog Bla ma offered the Karmapa a turquoise and asked him to reveal himself as Karmapa. The boy is said to have answered with a famous utterance, and regular topos: the equation with other important Buddhist masters: 'Sometimes I am Padmasambhava, sometimes I am Saraha and at other times I am Maitreya.'<sup>33</sup>

Upon his arrival in Ri bo che in 1510, the Karmapa met the local saṅgha and again successfully performed various tests. In sTa shod he related that he would like to go to Kong po, and a letter was prepared for him to go to the encampment. In his fifth year (1511), he proceeded to the area of 'O mo lung where he visited the house of dBon po dGa' ba. Sources subsequently depict a dialogue asserting the Karmapa's superiority over his rival, suggesting clairvoyant abilities. dBon po dGa' ba asked:

'Is the son of A mdo ba the Karmapa?'

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<sup>30</sup> According to mKhan po Nges don, this resolve to seek out the teaching was, among other factors, a decisive one for the Karmapa to become one of the most learned among the Karmapas. mKhan po Nges don further commented that he had seen a text putting forth this position. Unfortunately, the title was not remembered (oral communication, March 2007). It is highly likely that the dispute over the incarnation and its underpinnings had a considerable impact on the young Karmapa.

<sup>31</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 10b (p. 169).

<sup>32</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 14a (p. 59). There he was presented the hat of the Sixth Karmapa and another one, and two statues of the Sixth Karmapa, and in both cases chose the right one.

<sup>33</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 15b (p. 62): *lan re padma 'byung gnas yin/ lan re sa ra ha pa yin/ lan re byams pa dgon po yin* (see also *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1217). This saying is considered 'famous' in that it was reproduced by *Kam tshang* and found entry in all accounts of the Eighth Karmapa's life (Verhufen 1995: 30; Thinley 1980: 90 attributes the date wrongly to 1512; Douglas and White 1976: 86). Visionary meetings with Saraha or connection to him are a mark of all Tibetan Great Seal traditions, including the Second and Third Karmapa's (Schaeffer 2000: 95–98; Braitstein 2004: 64–66) and those of the dGe lugs pa (Willis 1995: 117).



‘I am Karmapa. The son of A mdo ba is a rebirth of the Zur mang incarnation,’ [Karmapa] answered.

[dBon po dGa’ ba asked again:] ‘Is he the one who passed away in rTse Lha khang or the one who passed away in rTsar shis?’

‘He is the one who passed away in rTsar shis; he is my monk.’<sup>34</sup>

In 1512 the Si tu pa passed away at Karma dgon and some of the monks from the encampment came for the funeral rites, thus establishing some contact. After the passing of the Si tu pa, the rGyal tshab Rin po che became the crucial person for establishing the Karmapa’s recognition. In the tenth lunar month of the ape year (1512), the Karmapa was invited to the Karma encampment for the first time. Two messengers (Bla ma Ri pa and bDe bzhi gshegs pa’i dbon po) were sent by rGyal tshab Rin po che from the encampment to rDzong gsar,<sup>35</sup> where the young Karmapa abided.<sup>36</sup> In the twelfth lunar month of the same year the Karmapa traveled via ’O lung monastery, ’Brang ra monastery, Ru shod, and Tshang rag gsum mdo to the direction of the encampment in Kong po.<sup>37</sup>

As the rival candidate was in the encampment at that time, the conflict over the two reincarnations reached its climax. Again, Bla ma Yang ri pa (who had acted as a messenger earlier) came with many offerings to invite the Karmapa for tea.<sup>38</sup>

The inhabitants of the encampment then decided to greet and invite the Lho rong Go shri, who—among others—was travelling with the Karmapa as attendant. However, a rule had been laid down that no one should offer silk scarves, tea invitations or prostrations to the arriving boy, as it was not yet settled whether he was truly the Karmapa. Furthermore, the rival candidate from the west was still present in the encampment. Nevertheless,

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<sup>34</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 17a (p. 65): *karma pa nga yin a mdo bu zur mang sku skye’i skye ba yin/ rtse lha khang la ’das pa de yin nam/ rtsar shis na ’das pa de yin zhus pas rtsar shis na ’das pa yin/ khong nga’i gra pa yin gsungs/*.

<sup>35</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 18b (p. 68). This is Lho rong rDzong gsar in Lho rong and probably not the monastery rDzong gsar which is further in the East (Dorje 1999, p. 465). *A khu A khra* first mentions only the word rDzong, later it is said he would be in rDzong gsar; the area however is the one of Lho rong.

<sup>36</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 18b (p. 68). The rGyal tshab had given his messengers two envelopes (or covers) with similar appearance. One contained words of truth (*bden thob*) and the other one was empty. As the young Karmapa, upon arrival of the messengers, chose the one with the words of truth, the messengers developed strong trust.

<sup>37</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 18b (p. 68).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 19a (p. 69).

the spiritual biographies report that most people, on seeing the boy from the east arriving, were overwhelmed by his charismatic presence and started to prostrate and venerate him, some with tears in their eyes.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the Karmapa was received in the encampment on the New Year day of the bird year (1513). Before the sunset, he met the rGyal tshab Rin po che, bKra shis don grub rnam rgyal, for the first time.<sup>40</sup>

While the future Karmapa had arrived, it would still be more than a month before his enthronement. In the first days, both boys were brought in front of a large assembly where they were asked to answer questions and give blessings. On this occasion, two sources depict the Karmapa as fearless and compassionate in all circumstances, whereas the second candidate, A mdo ba's son, is portrayed as crying and confused.<sup>41</sup>

The source mentions that at this point the inhabitants of the encampment had been split into two parties, each supporting one candidate. The rGyal tshab Rin po che tried to reconcile the parties and urged them not to become partial but to be upright and to trust in the analysis (*dpyod pa*) and careful examination of the candidates. Upon analysis it was revealed that the second candidate—though already seven years old—did not know more words than ‘father, mother, and food and drink’.<sup>42</sup>

The rGyal tshab's efforts did not bear results at first. On one occasion the future Karmapa (the eastern boy) was even stopped from stepping on the throne.<sup>43</sup> While public identifications continued, the boys were brought again into a row to identify statues and scroll paintings of former Karmapas. At the first occasion, on the twenty ninth day of the first lunar month, the rival candidate is reported to have failed. The second time, on the first day of the second lunar month, he managed to recognise a painting with the seal of a previous Karmapa. His supporters immediately proclaimed he had been recognised, which the other party doubted.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. fol. 19b (p. 70).

<sup>40</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 19b (p. 70); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1221f.; Sangs rgyas dpal grub fol. 10b (p. 169).

<sup>41</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 11b (p. 171); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1223. One should note that these two sources are written in retrospect. *A khu A khra*, whose author should have witnessed these events, fails to go into detail regarding the other candidate's abilities.

<sup>42</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 11b (p. 171); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1223.

<sup>43</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 20a (p. 71); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 122.

<sup>44</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 21a (p. 73). An interlinear remark (*mchan*) in ibid. fol. 21a–b (p. 73–74), expresses scepticism about the ‘public recognitions’ ‘these days’ (it is not clear from which time this interlinear remark stems): to examine an incarnation in such a manner and then carry out the recognition would not be suitable for high incarnations such as the Karmapa.

So heated was the atmosphere that the rGyal tshab Rin po che seems to have pondered a possible outbreak of violence. Though he had no doubts as to the identity of the Karmapa, the party supporting the other candidate was politically strong and had powerful allies. On the other hand, the people from Lho rong and rGya ston were fervent adherents of the boy the rGyal tshab had chosen. As no concurrence could be reached, the rGyal tshab suggested to the religious and political heads of the powerful provinces of Lho rong and rGya ston that they might remove the Karmapa from the camp.<sup>45</sup>

The inhabitants of these areas and their leaders considered this unacceptable, as the Karmapa had been decided as far as they were concerned, and threatened to drive out the other candidate and his party if they would not agree on the rightful Karmapa. Tensions mounted and the rGyal tshab worried that, if he did not enthrone the eastern boy and future Karmapa, some of his supporters might be tempted to start a war.<sup>46</sup> Finally, adherents of the second candidate made concessions and informed the rGyal tshab they would concur.<sup>47</sup>

As is typical of spiritual biographies, a dream of the rGyal tshab Rin po che is described as giving guidance.<sup>48</sup> On the thirtieth day of the first lunar month, he dreamt that the Karmapa himself (the eastern candidate) urged the rGyal tshab Rin po che to end the dispute which was underlined by the symbolic appearance of a white and a red *dākinī*. They incited him to let the truth be known and staunch the spread of lies. The rGyal tshab Rin po che, probably under enormous political and spiritual pressure to take a public decision, resolved to enthrone the eastern candidate and confer upon him the title of Karmapa.<sup>49</sup>

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Since, in fact, one would go to ask the common mob. Therefore, a master would not make effort in such recognition apart from to catch the minds of ordinary people.

<sup>45</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 11b (p. 171).

<sup>46</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1223; Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 12a (p. 172).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Specific reasons are not given, though it must be noted that Don yod rdo rje had just passed away in 1512 (see above).

<sup>48</sup> Wayman (1967: 2) explains dreams as literary themes in India and Tibet; he also discusses the dream (*ibid.* 11) as a means developed in the Buddhist tantras.

<sup>49</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 21b (p. 74). The whole incident was pictured in a slightly mistaken manner in previous accounts. Thinley (1980: 90): 'but when he [the rGyal tshab] met Mikyo Dorje, he spontaneously felt compelled to bow down to him.' Douglas and White (1976: 73–74): 'Gyaltsap Tulku Tashi Namgyal and Lama Yang Ripa travelled to Ri Wo Che in order to settle the matter, and vowed not to show any distinction between the two little boys until it was determined beyond doubt which of them was the true incarnation. However when they were presented before Mikyo Dorje they found themselves automatically doing full

Narratives subsequently establish the Karmapa's authority and his continuity with his predecessor, the Seventh Karmapa Chos grags rGyal mtsho, through the ritual of enthronement. In the morning light of the eleventh day of the second lunar month of the bird year (1513), the boy from the East ascended the throne of his predecessor. He received the black hat, symbol of the Karmapas, and the title 'Victorious Great Karmapa' (*rgyal ba karma pa chen po*).<sup>50</sup> The rGyal tshab saw the face of the late Seventh Karmapa in the sun and all in the encampment are reported to have woken up as if from a bad dream to a great trust in the Karmapa, asking themselves: 'What happened to us, that we were deluded before in such a way?'<sup>51</sup> The whole ceremony was a festivity, probably directly witnessed by a saṅgha of over three thousand and celebrated by an even larger number of devotees in the local markets. It is also said that offerings were sent by the Chinese emperor after the Karmapa was recognised.<sup>52</sup>

After the enthronement, on the fifteenth day of the second month of the bird year (1513), the Karmapa uttered praise to *dharmapāla* Mahākāla Ber nag chen and said that it would do away with all harm from non-human beings for the sGar pas.<sup>53</sup> This suggests that they had been under such an influence in the first place. The last doubters in the camp were persuaded by the genuine Karmapa, when he exhibited clairvoyance in knowing that 'official' adherents of the western boy's party secretly already venerated him.<sup>54</sup>

The story of the rival candidate is taken up later in the sources, illustrating the negative result of wrong views (*log lta*). It seems that with the unfavourable turn of events, Bla ma A mdo ba, the candidate's father,

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prostrations to him and thus realized that he must be undoubtedly the real Karmapa.' Verhufen (1995: 96, n. 59) has at least noted that Stein (1972: 147, employing *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*) indicates in two brief sentences the potential conflict of the situation.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. fol. 22a (p. 75); Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 12a (p. 172).

<sup>51</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1224: *sngar nged rang tsho de 'drar 'khrul pa ci byung ngam zhes*.

<sup>52</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 22a (p. 75). In the days thereafter, a series of visions of masters are described (ibid. fol. 22b/p. 76). Verhufen (1995: 49–51) explains the function of such visions as a sign of development of tantric practice and purity of the mental continuum. With special emphasis on the Eighth Karmapa, he has noted that visions take a special place in spiritual biographies. Stott (in Thinley 1980: 3) even deems them the crucial factor of the Karmapa biographies while Nālānda (1980: 313) underlines them as indicators of spiritual transmission.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. fol. 22b (p. 76). The text was entitled *mGon po ma hung mgu ma*, and may refer to a fragment with a slightly different title in the Eighth Karmapa's *Rang la nges pa'i tshad ma* fol. 9b.4–10a (p. 1056–58).

<sup>54</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 22b (p. 76); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1225.

became unhappy and wanted to leave the camp with his son. Though the rGyal tshab Rin po che urged him to stay, he grudgingly departed, which in turn led to a deterioration of his merit due to his wrong views.<sup>55</sup> The narrative relates this to a topos well known in spiritual biographies, finding parallels in the pre-birth stories of the Buddha: the bad times and the hesitation to take rebirth.<sup>56</sup> Its positioning close to the events surrounding the reincarnation may suggest at least a connection. The Karmapa is said to have related to the rGyal tshab Rin po che:

From when I died in the tiger year (*stag lo*, 1506) [as the Seventh Karmapa] until my rebirth in the hare year (*yos lo*, 1507) I stayed in [the pure realm of] dGa' ldan with Maitreya and in [the pure realm] Sukhāvātī and was happy. Then, because I was tired of people,<sup>57</sup> I thought it would be pointless to come here for the time being. When [thinking so] the protector Maitreya and the wisdom-*dākinīs* said, 'you have to take rebirth in the world (*jambudvīpa*).' Having taken rebirth until this year I have stayed in Lho rong.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, in the same year the Karmapa himself urged his followers not to think badly about the other boy.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Early Exposition, Composition, and Travels (1513–1516)

Following this, the Karmapa takes the first steps towards monkhood, and the narrative progresses to depict the deeds expected from a Buddhist meditation master and scholar: exposition (*bshad*), debate (*rtsod*), and composition (*rtsom*). Upon his enthronement in the third month of the bird year (1513), news of the Karmapa spread to all Karma bKa' brgyud monasteries in dBus and gTsang.<sup>60</sup> It seems that at this time people became aware that his name, Mi bskyod rdo rje ('Unshakable Vajra') was given to him by Padmasambhava.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 23a (p. 77).

<sup>56</sup> This idea started out with the concept of the transcendental Buddha as developed in early Mahāyāna by the Mahāsaṅghika-school, such as accounted in the *Mahāvastu* (Scherer 2005: 100).

<sup>57</sup> The phrase *mi rnams la yid chad pas* may also be read as *yid chad yod pas* = 'the people have broken faith'.

<sup>58</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 25b, (p. 82).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 25b, (p. 106).

<sup>60</sup> dPa' bo rin po che himself was witness to it at ten years old (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1224).

<sup>61</sup> *Kaṃi tshang*, p. 306. The earlier sources such as *A khu A khra*, *Sangs rgyas dpal grub* and *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* do not mentioned the granting of the name at this stage.

Around this period, the Karmapa started to take Buddhist precepts and received another name, although the accounts vary slightly: According to the *rnam thar* by A khu a khra, on the third day of the fourth lunar month (of the bird year 1513), the Karmapa received from the rGyal tshab Rin po che the eight precepts of the daily fast, the *upavāsatha* vows, and was given the name *Chos skyabs grags pa dpal bzang* ('Dharma-Refuge, Good Radiant Glory').<sup>62</sup> Then a few months later, on the third day of the eighth lunar month (*khnums kyi zla ba*), the rGyal tshab Rin po che performed a hair cutting ceremony in conjunction with inducted him into the 'going forth into homelessness' (*rab byung*, Skt. *pravrajyā*). Often, this term indicates the *śrāmaṇera*-vows of a novice monk.<sup>63</sup> This ritual took place in 'O lung Yang dgon.<sup>64</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* summarises the taking of vows in context of depicting the Karmapa's renunciation on the whole.<sup>65</sup>

After the first giving of his name, the rGyal tshab Rin po che, Mi bskyod rdo rje's first Buddhist teacher, taught him step by step to read and write (*yi ge*). He further passed on the empowerments of Hayagrīva and Vajra-vārāhī,<sup>66</sup> as well as instructions (*khrid*) of Buddha aspects such as Jina-sāgara, Vajrayoginī, and Mahākāla.<sup>67</sup> From his enthronement onwards, the Karmapa began travelling more extensively, journeying to various places in Khams such as bSa' g.yu khang, Ras brag lun, Sho lha sde, and dGa' ldan. In the same bird year (1513), the dialogues analysed in Chapter Five take place: two occur between the first and second teachings of the rGyal tshab, and two follow them.

<sup>62</sup> A khu a khra, fol. 24a (p. 78): *bya lo hor zla bzhi pa'i tshes gsum gyi nyin par gza' spa ba sangs dang skar ma snar ma 'dzom pa la rgyal tshab rin po che'i drung du theg pa chen po'i bsnen gnas kyi sdom pa mnos nas/ mtshan chos skyabs grags pa dpal bzang por gsol. Kaṃ tshang*, p. 307 reads the name variation 'Chos kyi grags pa dpal gzang po' and gives the thirteenth day. The *upavāsatha* vows are the observance of eight precepts during twenty-four hours (Tsomo 2004: 673).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. entry '*pravrajyā*' in Buswell, Robert E., and Donald S. Lopez. *The Princeton dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> A khu a khra, fol. 31b (p. 94). The phrase used is: *gtso bor sems rab tu byung ba'i zhar la khyim pa'i rtags spong ba'i ched du dbu skra bcad cing*. The hair cutting is associated with letting go of the householder's life.

<sup>65</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1226 explains that the Karmapa received the complete Mahāyāna *upāsaka* vows (*sdoms pa*) in conjunction with observing the eight precepts of the *poṣadha* (which is probably his account of the *upavāsatha* vows). He then later took on the signs of the *pravrajyā* together with a hair cutting plus the name and ensuingly the *dge tshul* vows of a novice monk from Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.

<sup>66</sup> A khu a khra, fol. 24a (p. 78).

<sup>67</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 3b (p. 355).

In the ninth month, the Karmapa delivered his first sermon to a large assembly. On the twentieth day he left rDzong gsar<sup>68</sup> for mDo khams and, ultimately, Ri bo che.<sup>69</sup> Local monks and lamas invited him to the ‘offering chamber’ (*mchod khang*), and presented him with tea and other large gifts (in a welcome ceremony). After uttering auspicious prayers he taught the meditation instruction (*zab khrid*) on the *guru yoga* and others to a pleased assembly. Later he is said to have given the reading transmission to the meditation (*sgom lung*) of Avalokiteśvara to more than ten thousand people assembled in a market place.<sup>70</sup> The earliest mentioned text was composed at the age of eight (1514): a commentary to a song (*mgur*) of Mi la ras pa, dealing with the Great Seal.<sup>71</sup>

The Karmapa then returned to Ngom, where he visited the birthplace of the Sixth Karmapa in Ngom shel. In the Re ne dgon seat he appointed dPal ldan bkra shis as abbot.<sup>72</sup> He finally went to the famed Karma monastery, where he was received with great pomp.<sup>73</sup> After briefly meeting two of his most important teachers, he was invited by Sangs rgyas mnyan pa of lDan ma to his monastery, Byang chub gling, where he was greeted by a large gathering.<sup>74</sup> He then journeyed slowly to Li thang and Nyag rong, which at that time was a stronghold of the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa, and finally returned north-eastwards to Zur mang bDe chen rtse.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Probably Lho rong rDzong gsar.

<sup>69</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1330 f. For these travels of the Karmapa, see also *A khu A khra*, fol. 29b (p. 90).

<sup>70</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 34b (p. 100). At that point the source talks about a Zhwa dmar ba. This does not refer, however, to the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa but to some unidentified lama with a red hat.

<sup>71</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun mi las rje sgam po pa pa gdams pa 'mgur 'grel*, *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vol. 15, pp. 1105–1110, 3 fols. Subsequently, further visions are introduced linking the Karmapa to both the epistemological tradition of Dignaga and Dharmakīrti and the epitome of the tantric yogin, Padmasambhava. He replied to a prayer: ‘I am Padmasambhava; you (Karmapa) are rGyal [ba] mchog dbyangs. Inseparable, [we] are the great Vajradhara; [we] rest in the unborn *dharmakāya*.’

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. fol. 35b (p. 102). Visions of Maitreya and Karmapa Pakṣi are reported.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. fol. 36b (p. 103).

<sup>74</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 311. The monastery was founded by Sangs rgyas mnyan pa and is located in the area of lDan ma, in region of sDe dge in Eastern Tibet. It is an area located at the ‘Bri chu river and synonymous with ‘Dan ma and ‘Dan khog (Dorje 1999: 474; Kessler 1983: 56, 65). The following events, in particular the travel to ‘Jang sa tham, are mentioned at a later stage in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, than in *Kaṃ tshang*.

<sup>75</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1231. For notes on the area of Li thang, where the First Karmapa had founded the monastery of Kam po gnas nang, see Dorje (1999: 433). *Kaṃ tshang*, p.

During these early years a patron-priest connection is forged, related by the narratives in typical fashion. The Karmapa accepted an invitation sent by the king of 'Jang Sa tham, an area very much south of Khams in today's south-west China.<sup>76</sup> On the third day of the third month of the mouse year (1516) the Eighth Karmapa arrived in Sa tham, staying for seven days. The event is described as a pompous exchange of gifts, and the young Karmapa passed on teachings to the king, his wives, and the local population. As a result of this link, the king promised not to engage in war with Tibet for thirteen years; he sent five-hundred boys for a monastic education to Tibet each year, and founded a hundred monasteries. The king also provided extensive funding for religious buildings.<sup>77</sup> It shows that through his position, the Karmapa, (likely urged by his retinue) became involved in the politics of the day, indicating the attraction he may have been for local lords.

#### 4.1.4 *Becoming a Scholar and Training the Great Seal (1516–1529)*

The ensuing twelve years were shaping ones for the young Karmapa, characterised by intense study with his main tutors and leading to the composition of the Karmapa's first major scholastic work, a commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.

Four teachers are mentioned as crucial in the spiritual biographies: (i) Sangs rgyas mnyan pa bKra shis dpal 'byor (1445/1457–1510/1525, sometimes called the *mahāsiddha* of gDan ma), (ii) bDud mo ma bKra shis 'od zer (b. 15th century, d. c. 1545), (iii) mKhan chen Chos grub seng ge (b. 15th century), and (iv) Karma 'phrin las pa I Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1456–1539).<sup>78</sup> The Karmapa named them the 'four great masters' (*rje btsun chen po rnam pa bzhi*), for through them he had accomplished the removal of obscuration and the accumulation of good (*bsags sbyang*).<sup>79</sup>

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312, mentions that the Karmapa also visited this monastery on his travel. For the various Zur mang monasteries see Dorje (1999: 484, 486).

<sup>76</sup> This area had been a Karma bKa' brgyud and rNying ma stronghold already during the Yuan period and is in Lithang, in today's province of Szechuan. The First Karmapa had founded Kam po gnas gnang in this area; Karma bKa' brgyud influence was diminished due to the rising dGe lugs influence from 1580 onwards (Dorje 1999: 496).

<sup>77</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 312–313. It is important to note that such numbers are not to be taken literally.

<sup>78</sup> For bKra shis 'od zer's passing away, see *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 345: *rje bkra shis 'od zer 'das pa'i dgongs rzogs bsrubs shing*. This was in 1545 (*sprul lo*).

<sup>79</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bslab pa'i khrid*, fol. 3a (p. 119).



All spiritual biographies, and the Karmapa's writings, indicate that Sangs rgyas mnyan pa was his main guru (Tib. *rtsa ba'i bla ma*), and took the central role of teaching him the Great Seal.<sup>80</sup> Although the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, as stated above, was not a direct teacher, he was apparently involved in selecting Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.<sup>81</sup> The Karmapa had met Sangs rgyas mnyan pa and bDud mo ba bKra shis 'od zer when he was eight years old (1514), reporting he had great confidence in them as his teachers.<sup>82</sup> The actual teacher-student relationship with Sangs rgyas mnyan pa started two years later in the eleventh month of the mouse year (1516) and lasted approximately three years, until the twenty ninth day of the second month of the hare year (1519).<sup>83</sup> During that time he is said to have attended his teacher constantly, suggesting that a close student-teacher relationship was established.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For an account of Sangs rgyas mnyan pa based on *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, see Verhufen (1995: 53–64). Sangs rgyas mnyan pa is invoked in the beginning of almost all the Eighth Karmapa's compositions, and the majority of spiritual biographies composed by the Eighth Karmapa deal with his revered teacher: *Sangs rgyas 'dan ma chen po'i mam thar* (an extensive work with twenty-eight folios), *rGyal ba thams cad mkhyen pa sangs rgyas rin po che*, and the eulogy *rJe mi bskyod rdo rjes dang sangs rgyas mnyan pa grub thob*.

<sup>81</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 20b (p. 189); *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232. Zhwa dmar pa told those in the encampment that as the rGyal tshab Rin po che and most of the Seventh Karmapa's students were already dead, the most suitable teacher among the living would be Sangs rgyas mnyan pa. A letter left by the Seventh Karmapa stated that, while there would be many suitable teachers among his direct students, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa was praised as the most suitable. The later *Kam tshang*, p. 314, adds that this letter had been kept by the Si tu Rin po che and that the Karmapa had been saying since he was small that his lama would be Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.

<sup>82</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 20a (p. 188). Because both their names contain the phrase 'bkra shis', they are also sometimes called the 'two bKra shis' (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232: *bkra shis nam gnyis*). Sources also mention that the two teachers had been prophesised to the Karmapa in various visions. See *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232; Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 20b (p. 189); see also Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nam thar*, fol. 3a (p. 334). In *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 3b (p. 355), the Karmapa considers Sangs rgyas mnyan pa to be a rebirth of the siddha Mitrajñāna.

<sup>83</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 14a (p. 176). He attended Sangs rgyas mnyan pa from the eleventh month of this year (*byi lo*) onwards, see *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232. As for the place of meeting, *Kam tshang*, p. 331 has sDe gu dgon and *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232, has Ra ti dGa' ldan gling.

<sup>84</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232; Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21b (p. 191).

## *The Karmapa's Education in General*

Accounts of the Karmapa's education often begin by describing his entering into the three vows.<sup>85</sup> The reception of the *upāsaka* and *śrāmaṇera* vows was accompanied by studies of the related commentaries on monastic discipline.<sup>86</sup> In conjunction with Sangs rgyas mnyan pa transmitting him the bodhisattva vows from the traditions of both Aśaṅga and Nāgārjuna, the Karmapa studied the commentaries related to the precepts (*bslab bya*) and esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) of the bodhisattvas such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.<sup>87</sup>

Along with the tantric empowerments, which constitute the reception of tantric vows, the Karmapa studied the root tantras (*rtsa rgyud*) and the explanatory tantras (*bshad rgyud*), as well as the necessary rituals (*sādhana*), side-rituals (*las tshog*), reading transmissions (*lung*), and, most importantly, the meditation instructions (*khrid*) and esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) of the creation and completion stages.<sup>88</sup> These transmissions were not limited to tantric cycles popular in the bKa' brgyud traditions but incorporated the four schools and the nine vehicles of the rNying ma pa.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> For the following depiction of the teachings received see Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i mnam thar*, fol. 3a (p. 334); *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 3bf. (p. 355f.); Sangs rgyas dpal grub, 20bf. (p. 189f.) and *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232f. For an introduction to the three vow theories, see Sobisch (2002a: 9–15).

<sup>86</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232, reads: 'The bigger and smaller scriptures teaching the precepts of those [the vows]' (*de'i bslab bya ston pa'i gzhung che chung nams*). This probably refers to the *Vinayasūtra* (*Q*, no. 5619) and its commentaries; 'Vinaya' in Tibet referring to the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins (Tucci 1980: 111; see Prebish 1975: 44–96, for a translation of the Sanskrit *Prātimokṣasūtras* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins).

<sup>87</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232: 'He brought forth the mind set on enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) from the two traditions of the chariot holders [Nāgārjuna and Aśaṅga] and the treatises of the conduct part that show the precepts of it (*bodhicitta*)' (*shing rta srol gnyis las byang chub tu sems bskyed de de'i bslab bya ston pa'i spyod phyogs kyi gzhung 'grel man ngag nams dang*). It is assumed that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* belonged to these commentaries, plausibly also works such as *Mahāyānasamgraha* and *Ratnāvali*.

<sup>88</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21a (p. 190) term these the limitless 'esoteric precepts of the creation and completion stages' (*man ngag bskyed rdzogs*). All narratives use the common Tibetan scheme of the four tantra classes, occasionally listing an example for each, such as Vajrapāṇi for the *kriyā-tantras*, Vajradhātuma for the *yoga-tantras*, and Kālacakra for the *anuttarayoga-tantras*.

<sup>89</sup> In *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 3b (p. 355f), the term 'play of awareness empowerment' (*rig pa rtsal gyi dbang*) is found in the context of the nine vehicles of the rNying ma pa.

Finally, the esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) are listed, which usually accompany the completion stage of tantric meditation.<sup>90</sup> The enumeration of nine profound instructions (*gdams pa zab mo*) that he received is similar to Kong sprul's main eight transmission lineages: Sa skya, bKa' brgyud, 'Jo nang, Zhwa lu, Severance (*gcod*), Pacifying (*zhi byed*) and Dwags po bKa' brgyud, Shang pa bKa' brgyud and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*).<sup>91</sup> He also received numerous transmissions of other bKa' brgyud schools, such as 'Ba' rom, Tshal pa, Phag mo gru pa, as well as 'Bri gung, sTag lung, and 'Brug pa teaching cycles.<sup>92</sup>

### *Practice of the Great Seal under Sangs rgyas mnyan pa*

It is vital for this thesis to pay attention to how sources account for the Karmapa's receiving of the Great Seal, thus significant passages are translated and analysed.<sup>93</sup> The spiritual memoir *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, without mentioning the Great Seal explicitly, states:

... remembering [my teacher] day and night, I received the four empowerments uninterruptedly through the profound path of the *vajra-yoga*.<sup>94</sup>

This expression is in accord with Great Seal practice as known in the tantras. In another spiritual memoir, the Karmapa explicitly specifies the realisation of the Great Seal.<sup>95</sup> After a description of his studies, the Karmapa states:

I fully and wholly obtained and pondered (*snyams*) the instructions (*gdams pa*) of [our] lineage, [e.g.] the varieties of instructions (*gdams pa*) of Nāro

<sup>90</sup> Newman (2000: 587–589), Cozort (1996: 337).

<sup>91</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* fol. 3b (p. 355). The term 'bKa' brgyud' used here most likely refers to all major and minor lineages, as the subcategories Dwags po and Shangs pa are mentioned separately.

<sup>92</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21a (p. 190). At times, the completion stage practices are mentioned by name, such as the six yogas (*sbyor drug*) usually connected to the Kālacakra-cycle, the path and fruit (*lam 'bras*), or the five stages (*rim lnga*).

<sup>93</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 3a (p. 334). Verhufen (1995: 60) translates the very brief passage in the spiritual biography about Sangs rgyas mnyan pa in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1205 and the according sentences from *Kam tshang* (Verhufen 1995: 83–84).

<sup>94</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4a (p. 356): *nyin msthan nam dran zab lam rdo rje'i mal 'byor gyi sgo nas dbang bzhi chag med du len pa'o*. Unfortunately, it is not clear which kind of *vajra-yoga* is meant here. Essentially, it could be any tantric practice of the completion stage.

<sup>95</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar rje nyid kyis rnam thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa*, fol. 3a (p. 334).

and Maitrī such as the six doctrines of Nāro (*nā ro chos drug*), the Great Seal, and the [deity] recitations and accomplishment<sup>96</sup> [of] Ras chung pa. [This was] whatever the Self Arisen Padmavajra [The Third Karmapa] had obtained (*nod*).<sup>97</sup>

During the three years that I attended the Great Buddha mNyan pa with devotion, for the very sake of obtaining the good qualities, there was no other method to be influenced (*'jug*) by [his] compassion than training in pure appearances (*dag snang*)!<sup>98</sup> By means of that, all possibilities (*gnas skabs*) of wrong view were defeated; and through the wisdom which knows that the teacher is without mistake, [I] was blessed, his kindness being incomparable to that of others.<sup>99</sup>

Notably, the Karmapa enumerates the six doctrines, the Great Seal, and practices of Ras chung pa as key practices of the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage. But how does one practice such instructions? Training in pure appearances (*dag snang*) (in connection with the teacher) is regarded as the crucial method, which implies that the practitioner must attempt to perceive the guru as an embodiment of enlightenment: a fully awakened Buddha.

The spiritual memoir composed by the Karmapa's student Sangs rgyas dpal grub, too, accentuates the role of the spiritual instructor.<sup>100</sup> According to Sangs rgyas dpal grub, the transmission of the lineage from teacher to student, compared to one butter lamp filling the other, is possible because in the oral transmission (*bka' babs*) of Tilo and Nāro the lama appears as Buddha. Realisation (of the Great Seal) is thus equated with the conferring

<sup>96</sup> Zhang Yisun: *bsnyen sgrub – yi dam gyi sngags bzla ba dang sgom sgrub byed pa*.

<sup>97</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar rje*, fol. 3b (p. 335): *rang byung mtsho skyes rdo rje*. Zhang Yisun: *mtsho skyes rdo rje* is one of the eight forms of Padmasambhava (*guru mtshan brgyad*). But here it refers to the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (supported by the context and oral communication, mKhan po Nges don, March 2007).

<sup>98</sup> This pure view can be interpreted, according to mKhan po Nges don, as meaning that the Guru should be seen as Buddha.

<sup>99</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nram thar rje*, fol. 3b (p. 335): *brgyud pa'i gdams pa nā ro chos drug dang/ /phyag rgya chen po ras chung bsnyen grub sogs/ / nā ro maitrī'i gdams pa ji snyed pa/ /rang byung mtsho skyes rdo rje gang nod kun/ /lhag ma med par phal cher thib bam snyam/ /de tshe sangs rgyas chen po mnyan pa la/ /lo gsum bar du gus pas bsten pa na/ /legs pa'i yon tan thob pa'i ched nyi kyi/ /dag snang sbyang thugs rjes 'jug thabs gzhan/ /med pas log lta'i gnas skabs kun bcom nas/ /yongs 'dzin 'khrul med shes pa'i shes rab kyi/ /gzhan dring (drin) med par byin gyis rlabs par mdzad/*.

<sup>100</sup> True to the genre, the Karmapa's studies are described in idealised manner in Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21a (p. 190): 'At the time of studying he remembered every word, at the time of contemplation he [achieved] certainty in the meaning and at the time of meditation he let arise in his mindstream as many particular experiences as possible' (*thos pa'i dus su tshig zin/ bsam pa'i dus don nges/ sgom pa'i dus su thugs rgyud la myong khyad par can ci skyer mdzad pa*).

of blessing. This would, however, be dependent upon the fact that the Karmapa would be a high incarnation and had attended his teachers with veneration and respect.<sup>101</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che confirms:

In particular [the Karmapa] perfected the oral transmission (*bka' babs*) of blessing; since the lineage of [understanding the ultimate] meaning and [receiving] blessing of the incomparable Dwags po bKa' brgyud was transferred to his mind, like from one butter lamp a second is lit.<sup>102</sup>

These accounts implicate, that it was at this point the Karmapa attained accomplishment; at least it was an outward demonstration of his already enlightened mind.<sup>103</sup> In the context of the later education, depicted below, it is evident that training and understanding of the Great Seal preceeded the Eighth Karmapa's scholastic studies. It is noteworthy that the actual term 'Great Seal' is used only once in one of the Karmapa's spiritual memoirs.

Throughout this period of education with Sangs rgyas mnyan pa, the Karmapa continued to travel with him to various monasteries in Eastern Tibet, such as Rab ko, Ra 'og, Tsher lung mda', Kre yul dom tsha nang, where he appointed various abbots. He was even received by the saṅgha of the far eastern great Jo nang seat in 'Dzam thang.<sup>104</sup>

When, in 1519, messengers arrived from the Ming king Wu-tsung the Eighth Karmapa declined the invitation and continued to travel to Li thang where he composed a praise of Nāgārjuna.<sup>105</sup> On that occasion, the

<sup>101</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21a (p. 190).

<sup>102</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1233: *khyad par mnyam med dwags po bka' brgyud kyi byin rlabs don kyi brgyud pa mar me gcig las gnyis pa mched pa ltar thugs la 'phos pas byin rlabs kyi bka' babs rdzogs pa gyur la*.

<sup>103</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21b (p. 191). Sangs rgyas dpal grub remarks that the Karmapa's way of adhering to a teacher would be inconceivable to us (*rang chag*) and propounds the great spiritual value of seeing or thinking about this *nam thar* (here maybe 'complete liberation'), again showing the inspirational function of such narratives.

<sup>104</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1232. For the 'Dzam thang area (situated further to the east of sDe dge), see Dorje (1999: 612). The Jo nang monastery survived the persecutions and recently Kapstein discovered an edition of Dol po pa's *gsung 'bum* (Kapstein 1992; see also Stearns 1999: 2).

<sup>105</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1233. According to Richardson (1980: 348), the party carried an invitation-letter by Wu-tsung authored in 1516. According to *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1234, the Eighth Karmapa was again invited to China upon returning to Byang chub gling and to Karma dgon. This time a large army is mentioned, which must have raised Tibetan anxieties (Richardson 1980: 349). The story goes that, when sitting in front of the statue of the First Karmapa, it told him not to go to China this time (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1234). Tucci (1949: 255, n. 95) had noted with Chinese sources that it was the Fourth Dalai Lama (1475–1543) who had been invited; but *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* is clearly indicating the Eighth Karmapa. Chinese and Tibetan sources are also at variance when it comes to the supposed attack on the inviting party, which each ascribe to Tibetans or the Chinese

Karmapa visited the Gling drung family and received a Kālacakra transmission from Sangs rgyas mnyan pa in mTshur phu.<sup>106</sup> After guiding the Karmapa, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa was pleased and his wishes were fulfilled.<sup>107</sup> He passed away in the first month of the hare year (1519).<sup>108</sup> During the funeral rites, the Karmapa uttered a verse in veneration of his teacher and had a vision of Sangs rgyas mnyan pa on the shoulder of the Buddha statue.<sup>109</sup> The Karmapa spent the Tibetan New Year of the ensuing dragon year (1520) in Tsher lung monastery.<sup>110</sup>

*Becoming a Scholar: Studies with bDud mo ba bKra shis 'od zer*

bDud mo ba bKra shis 'od zer played a decisive and heretofore unacknowledged role in shaping the Eighth Karmapa's development as a Buddhist scholar. From Sangs rgyas mnyan pa's death onwards until meeting mKhan chen Chos grub and Karma 'phrin las pa, the Karmapa mainly relied on this teacher.<sup>111</sup> In the fourth month of the dragon year (1520) the Eighth

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envoys, respectively (Richardson 1980: 348–349). The Fourth Karmapa (1340–1383) had established ties with Ming Taizu (reigned 1368–1398); and the Fifth Karmapa, too, visited the court of Ch'eng-tsu, who at first tried to emulate the former Sa skya-Mongol relations (Sperling 1980: 186–189). From then on, successive Karmapas had loose ties to the Ming kings (Kapstein 2006b: 123–124). When shortly afterwards invited to Mongolia (*Kam tshang*, p. 316.), the Karmapa declined the invitation; the contact to Mongolia under Dayan Khan (1465–1543) seems to have been rather formal (Richardson 1980: 349).

<sup>106</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1233. This passage is examined in conjunction with the *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan* in Chapter Five (5.3.1).

<sup>107</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1234, concludes the three years of study: '[The Karmapa] received day and night—uninterruptedly—empowerments, reading transmissions, explanations (*bshad*), and experiential instructions (*mnyam khrid*); he made their meaning an experience. Through studying texts doubts were removed (*gcod par mdzad*) immediately and [his] realisation of the wisdom of how things are and how they appear [became] most excellent' (*nyin mtshan bar med du dbang lung bshad nyams khrid rnams gsan/ de'i don thugs nyams su bzhes/ phyag dpe gzigs rtog gi sgo nas 'dags pa'ang 'phral du gcod par mdzad cing ji lta ba ji snyed kyi mkhyen pa rtogs phul du byung*).

<sup>108</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 316. Verhufen, (1995: 61, translating *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1205) explains that he died in his 'middling monastic seat', i.e. in one of his monasteries near lDan ma.

<sup>109</sup> This event may have taken place in Byang chub gling. See also Verhufen (1995).

<sup>110</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 318.

<sup>111</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4a, calls him a 'bodhisattva abiding on the eighth level' (*sa brgyad pa la gnas pa'i byang chub sems dpa'*). According to a brief account of bDud mo ma's life in *Kam tshang*, pp. 261–261, he had received the name 'bKra shis 'od zer' from the Seventh Karmapa. From his eighth year onwards he studied with a dGe lugs pa dGe bshes and deepened his education in dGa' lDan monastery. He had later met the Seventh Karmapa and received instructions of the Great Seal, the six doctrines of Nāropa,

Karmapa travelled to Ra ti dGa' ldan gling, learning with bDud mo ba intensely for approximately three years. During that time the envoys from China probably attempted to summon the Karmapa for the last time, although sources contain slightly conflicting explanations.<sup>112</sup>

A spiritual memoir offers insight into the young Karmapa's most likely motives for his refusal to journey to the Chinese court.<sup>113</sup> The passage at first recounts the belief that the Seventh Karmapa had prophesied that he had—in order to protect the doctrine—manifested in his own form and that of the king of China. When the king urgently wished to receive teachings from the rebirth of the Karmapa, the spiritual memoir states:

At that time [I] was still a child, [and] even if I had not been one, I did not have in my mind even partially the qualities needed for going to serve as a spiritual teacher of a magically emanated [Chinese] emperor. Therefore, feeling intimidated, I was fed up with my own past deeds. [And I wondered] about my being called 'Karmapa', asking, for what [action] is it the punishment (*nyes pa*)?<sup>114</sup>

This passage is imbued with a pleasant humility and exhibits some rather personal traits. Studies with bDud mo ba made amends for the Karmapa's need of a more elaborate scholastic education. After receiving explanations on tantric teachings (*rgyud kyi bshad bka'*) such as the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* and the famed *Zab mo nang gi don* (*Profound Inner Meaning*), the Eighth Karmapa engaged in intense study of sūtra teachings such as the

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the *dohā*-cycles, and teachings on numerous scholastic topics. He became teacher of the Eighth Karmapa towards the end of his life.

<sup>112</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236, mentions that in the fourth month of the dragon year, 'it seems' (*snang*) he went to Ra ti dGa' ldan gling, met bDud mo ba, and met the messengers of the Chinese emperor (*gser yig pas*). The spiritual memoir Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 4a (p. 336), mentions only the Karmapa's fourteenth year, which would be around 1520. The succession of events in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (p. 1233f.) and *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 318, however, suggests that at least two visits had taken place before 1519, when Sangs rgyas mnyan pa passed away. Only after the last futile attempt to invite the young lama, the king passed away in 1521 (1520 according to *Kaṃ tshang*), which is in turn viewed as an indication of the Karmapa's clairvoyance. The spiritual memoir discussed below, however, offers a more 'personal' explanation.

<sup>113</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 3b–4b (p. 335–338).

<sup>114</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 4a (p. 336): *de tshe bdag ni lang tsho ma rdzogs shing/ /lang tsho rdzogs kyang sprul pa'i rgyal po yi/ dge ba'i bshes su 'gro ba'i yon tan bi/ /cha shas tsam yang rgyud la ma 'tshal bas/ sems zhum rang gi las la yi chad de/ /bdag la karma pa zhes grags pa yi/ bla dwags 'di 'dra ci yi nyes pa yin/*.

*dharma*s of Maitreya (*byams pa'i chos*), the *pāramitās* and various doctrinal systems (*grub mtha'*).<sup>115</sup>

The spiritual memoir reports that he deepened his understanding, and perfected his skills in the deeds of a scholar (e.g. composition, exposition, and debate) to such an extent that he was confident of guiding others effectively and 'grant [them] realisation' (*rtogs par sbyin pa*).<sup>116</sup> This would not exclude the possibility that the Karmapa had been previously able to teach general topics, meditation practices or even the Great Seal in an intuitive way.

Consequently, after studying with bDud mo ba, the Karmapa started to give more elaborate teachings on scriptures and treatises, visiting important religious sites, and giving lessons to large audiences, mainly in the areas of Kong po, Dwags po, and Khams.<sup>117</sup> Further deeds expected from an incarnate lama are accounted for: doing retreat; recognising incarnations and appointing abbots as well as establishing further ties with important donors and patrons.<sup>118</sup>

After meeting Ngo khrod Rab 'byams pa in rNam thos kyi ri bo, the young Karmapa received a letter from the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa. The Zhwa dmar pa expressed his deep wish of wanting to meet the Karmapa despite difficult conditions, offering him all his monasteries, including the patrons. This meant the Karmapa had to take charge of a significant body of monasteries in dBus and gTsang, along with growing responsibility and influence.<sup>119</sup> Within three years, the Zhwa dmar pa passed away (1524).

At age seventeen (1523), on a pilgrimage to the relics (*sku gdung*) of Padmasambhava, problems in Kong po interrupted his travels. He re-

<sup>115</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 21b (p. 191). The corpus of teachings termed 'dharma of Maitreya' contains such texts as the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, which elaborates on the stages of realisation of a bodhisattva (Dreyfus 2005a: 277, 281).

<sup>116</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 22a (p. 192). How he deepened his understanding is literally expressed as 'nature of objects of knowledge' *shes bya'i gnas tshul* (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar* fol. 4b/p. 377).

<sup>117</sup> Passing the lunar New Year of the snake year (1521) in Lhun po rtse, he continued to visit holy places, such as the birthplace of the First Karmapa, and taught in Ri bo che. It is reported that at this time he already passed on the *upāsaka* vows (*dge bsnyen*) to students (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 320).

<sup>118</sup> The king of Mon in the southern borderland adjoining Bhutan offered gold and various other precious substances (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 326). Dorje (1999: 199): 'Tsho na county is the modern name for Mon yul, the vast region to the east of Lho brak and south of Lhun rtse bordering on Bhutan.'

<sup>119</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, 1259–1260; *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 322.



conciled the parties there.<sup>120</sup> After passing the Tibetan New Year sheep year (*lug lo*, 1523) in Phu lung, he imparted the Buddhist refuge to the young rGyal tshab pa Grags pa dPal 'byor and exposition on the *Byams chos sde lnga* (*Five Treatises of Maitreya*) to the sTag lung pa.<sup>121</sup> He then journeyed to dGa' ldan Ma mo in Eastern Tibet, where he taught meditation instructions.<sup>122</sup> Continuing his travels, he identified a young boy as the rebirth of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, gave him Buddhist refuge and the name dKon mchog yan lag. The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa would become his most important student. In the lunar New Year (*lo gsar*) of the pig year (1527) he passed Ba yo.<sup>123</sup>

### *Full Ordination and Formal Completion of Studies*

In 1527, the twenty-one year old Karmapa met Karma 'phrin las pa and Chos grub seng ge; this marked his entry into the last phase of becoming a thoroughly trained scholar and fully ordained monk.<sup>124</sup> The then seventy-two year old Karma 'phrin las pa, learned in both the Sa skya and bKa' brgyud traditions, had already acted as tutor of the young dPa' bo Rin po che and many other illustrious masters.<sup>125</sup>

After their first meeting, the Karmapa invited both Chos grub Seng ge and Karma 'phrin las pa to rNam thos kyi ri bo in Kong po and requested full ordination.<sup>126</sup> On the third day of the eleventh month of the pig year (1527/ 28) the Karmapa received ordination (*upasampadā*) into full monkhood (*bhikṣu*) in front of the assembled saṅgha. mKhan chen Chos grub

<sup>120</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 4b (p. 337).

<sup>121</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 323. There he had a dream of the 'Bri gung chos rje Kun dga' rin chen and Sa skya Paṇḍita, who in the end recited the Karmapa mantra (*ibid.*, p. 321).

<sup>122</sup> dGa' ldan Ma mo was the main establishment of the Zhwa dmar pas in Eastern Tibet. It had been founded as a hermitage by the Second Zhwa dmar, mKha' spyod dbang po in 1386 and been expanded later (Ehrhard 2002a: 15).

<sup>123</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 325.

<sup>124</sup> For the First Karma 'phrin las pa's life and works and his teaching the Karmapa and dPa' bo Rin po che, see Rheingans (2004).

<sup>125</sup> Before this first meeting *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 327, describes a dream in which he appears to the Karmapa.

<sup>126</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 22b (p. 193). So far this monastery could not be further localised. The text only specifies the site of the Karmapa's ordination as 'the temple in the seclusion of rNam thos kyi ri bo' (*rnam thos kyi ri bo'i sang dben gtsug lag khang*). At their first meeting Karma 'phrin las pa bestowed upon him tantric instructions such as 'the six teachings of refined gold' (*chos drug gser zhun ma*), as well as 'the great six teachings' (*chos drug chen mo*) (Rheingans 2004: 121).

Seng ge was the *upādhyāya*, Karma 'phrin las pa had the role of *karmācārya*, and dPal Shākya bzang po acted as *raho'nuśāsaka*.<sup>127</sup> The Karmapa received the name of Chos grub grags pa dpal bzang ('Accomplished Dharma, Good Radiant Fame').<sup>128</sup>

Chos grub Seng ge decisively influenced the Karmapa's early adherence to the *gzhan stong* in his *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*-commentary, his first major scholastic work.<sup>129</sup> Along with instructions on tantric cycles such as Guhyasamāja, Cakrasaṃvara, Kālacakra, and Amitāyus, Chos grub Seng ge taught him the '*Dul ba me tog phreng ba* (*Vinaya Flower Garland*).<sup>130</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che reports:

He taught him various large *gzhan stong* explanations (*bshad pa*) and asked him to uphold [this] view. Therefore he later commented on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* in the tradition of Jo [nang] and Zi [lung pa].<sup>131</sup>

And Karmapa said:

And the mKhan po said, giving [me] the book of the *Me tog phreng brgyud*, 'Explain this meaning'; and [then] I studied well the treatise known as the *bsTan pa spyi 'grel* (*General Commentary on the Doctrine*), composed by the omniscient Dol po pa.<sup>132</sup>

The Karmapa also studied the sixfold yoga (*yan lag drug*) with Chos grub seng ge, a practice which, in the context of Kālacakra, is strongly connected to the *gzhan stong* teachings.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>127</sup> The *karmācārya*'s role at a ceremony is to read the texts, while 'the teacher for the secret' or 'private instructor' (*raho'nuśāsaka*, *gsang ston*) inquires about hindering conditions (the term is *raho'nuśāsaka* is confirmed in Edgerton 1953). For ordination in early Vinaya, see Frauwallner 1956; for *pravrajyā* and *upasampadā* in early Buddhism, see Prebish 1975: 2–5.

<sup>128</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236; Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 22b (p. 193).

<sup>129</sup> This significantly adds to understanding the context of the Eighth Karmapa's Madhyamaka-viewpoint; it was neither noted by Williams (1983a), nor Ruegg (1988).

<sup>130</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 23a (p. 194).

<sup>131</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236. Zi lung pa is Śākya mChog ldan (Stearns 1999: 214, n. 129).

<sup>132</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 5a (p. 338).

<sup>133</sup> See Stearns (1999: 37ff.). Soon after the ordination, Chos grub seng ge passed away (Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 23b/p. 195, *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236). Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bslab pa'i khrid*, fol. 3a (p. 119), describes Chos grub seng ge's last words. The Karmapa has also written a praise of Chos grub seng ge: *mKhan chen chos grub seng ge la bstod pa*, 2 fols. This title contains two texts: A praise of mKhan chen Chos grub seng ge (title, up to 2a.1), which was written in rNam thos kyi ri bo and it is therefore likely that the Karmapa composed it around 1527–1530. It is followed by a praise of the Karmapa, *Karma pa brgyad pa' i bka' bstod* (–2b), probably written by Chos grub seng ge.

A spiritual memoir additionally states that he was motivated to comment in *gzhan stong*-fashion in order to continue the work of his predecessor: the Seventh Karmapa had started this commentary with the agenda of averting the danger of understanding emptiness as nihilism (*chad stong*), but could not complete it.<sup>134</sup> The Eighth Karmapa began composing the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*-commentary in 1529 in rTse lha khang (completed in 1531), where he had spent some time in concentrated meditation (*bya bral*), and studied the Seventh Karmapa's treatise on Buddhist epistemology with Śākya Rin chen.<sup>135</sup>

The Karmapa had studied the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* during a period of extensive education at the feet of the aged Karma 'phrin las pa, following his ordination in 1527. A key passage illustrates the scope of his studies:

In the beginning he (the Karmapa) studied with the master (*rje*) Karma 'phrin las pa, a commentary of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* [called] clarifying the meaning (*don gsal*)<sup>136</sup>, during three sessions each day. [The Karmapa] asked to raise the [number of] sessions [per day] and ['Phrin las pa] answered: 'if we did that, wouldn't it be a mere pretense of studying?' But [the Karmapa] recited the words and the meaning [of the treatise by heart], just as they were and [then] they did eight to nine sessions [every day]. Within only two months he knew [the text] completely.

Then he learned again the great treatises of sūtra and tantra: The other four teachings of Maitreya, *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, *Pramāṇavārttika*, *Nyāyabindu*, the four *Gyes* (*sic!*) *pa'i bstan bcos*<sup>137</sup>, *Abhidharmakośa* and *Abhidharmasa-*

<sup>134</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 5b (p. 339) and fol. 7a (p. 341). It has to be taken into account that this source stems from the year 1534, i.e. before the Eighth Karmapa had composed his monumental Madhyamaka work. An interlinear remark of unknown origin in yet another text reads that the Eighth Karmapa taught *gzhan stong* due to a request by Chos grub seng ge, but it was not his extraordinary (*thun mong ma yin pa*) ultimate (*mthar thug*) view (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *dPal rdo rje dbyang can 'jigs pa dang bral ba'i zhal lnga [snga] nas kyi mdzad pa nges don nying khu zhes bya ba*, fol. 4b/p. 852). Neither authorship of the Eighth Karmapa is explicitly stated nor is the author of the interlinear remarks known (who due to the phrasing seems to be someone else). Si tu Paṇ chen's later *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 326, relates the *gzhan stong* with a visionary experience. It needs to be remembered that Si tu bStan pa'i nyin byed was himself a supporter of the *gzhan stong* theory.

<sup>135</sup> For the place see *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 336. For the date, see the colophon of this text in *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i lung chos mtha' dag*, vol. 12, fol. 342f.

<sup>136</sup> '*Grel pa don gsal* most likely refers to Harbihadra's *Śāstra-vṛtti* also called *Sphuṭārtha* (Ruegg 1988: 1271).

<sup>137</sup> *Gyes* is likely a wrong or variant of *dgyes* for *dgyes pa rdo rje*, 'Hevajra'; thus maybe 'the four treatises of Hevajra'. *Gyes pa* as such is a past form of 'gyes pa; another form of *gye ba* = 'to be divided, to separate, to part, to issue, proceed'. The Sanskrit *He* in Hevajra is an exclamative particle and signifies great compassion according to Kāṇha.

*muccaya*<sup>138</sup>, the *Vinayasūtra*, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Madhyamakāvatāra*, *rTag gnyis* (*The Two Chapters*, i.e. the *Hevajratantra*)<sup>139</sup>, and the *rTsis kun bsdu pa* (*Summary of Astrology*). [Furthermore] the manuals (*yig cha*) of rNgog Lo tsā ba and Phya [pa Chos kyi seng ge] and gTsang [nag pa] as well as *sDom gsum rab dbyed* and *Rigs gter* (*Treasury of Knowledge*) of Sa [skya] Paṇ[ḍita].

In short: he studied the entire words and the meaning of twenty-five great texts and comprehended them easily! The [tantric] empowerments, permissions (*rjes gnang*), esoteric precepts, and meditation instructions, which he received in the breaks, were immeasurable.

He studied for three years [but in fact] followed classes for fourteen months [only]<sup>140</sup>, studying and reflecting uninterruptedly. However, [this time] seemed to be just one year. Meanwhile he comprehended the deep [meaning] of every single teaching and hardly took breaks for tea: he reflected on the words and meaning day and night, examined the doubts about the difficult points, and analysed contradictions. The precious teacher [Karma 'phrin las pa] in turn greatly praised [the Karmapa's] mental energy and knowledge!<sup>141</sup>

Most sources consider these intense studies with Karma 'phrin las pa, which certainly emphasised the detailed study of the great treatises and Buddhist epistemology, to have been the formal completion of his studies.<sup>142</sup> During that time, the Karmapa also engaged in yogic

<sup>138</sup> Lit.: 'the upper and lower *Abhidharma*'.

<sup>139</sup> Commentary on the *Hevajra-Tantra*.

<sup>140</sup> This means that he seems to actually have had lessons for fourteen months within three years. In the breaks he could have received empowerments or gone on short retreats.

<sup>141</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1237: *rje phrin las zhabs las thog mar mngon rtogs rgyan gyi 'grel pa don gsal la nyin re mthun gsum gyis gsan par mdzad pa na thun mang du spar par zhush pas de ltar na gsan lo las mi yong ngam gsung pa na slar tshig don rnams ji lta ba bskyar bas thun brgyad dgu tsam mdzad ste zla ba gnyis tsam gyis dpyis phyin par mkhyen nas/ slar byams chos gzhan bzhi tshad ma kun btus/ rnam 'grel nges/ rigs thig/ gyes (sic!) pa'i bstan bcos bzhi/ mngon pa gong 'og/ dul ba mdo rtso/ dbu ma rtso shes 'jug/ brtag gnyis/ rtsis kun bsdu pa sogs mdo sngags kyi gzhung chen rnams dang/ bod yul gyi rngog lo dang phyag gtsang gi yig cha/ sa paṇ gyi sdom rig la sogs mdor na gzhung chen nyer lnga'i tshig don thams cad gsan zhiṅg bde glag tu khong du chud par mdzad/ de dag gi bar rnams su dbang rjes gnang man ngag khrid gsan pa ni mtha' yas/ de ltar gsan pa'i yun lo ngo gsum zla ba [in smaller letters dngos] bcu bzhi la gsan bsam bar ma chad pa lo gcig kho nar snang rung de srid gsol ja'ang cung zad las mi bzhes par nyin mtshan bar med par tshig don bsam pa dka' gnas (=gnad?) la dogs dpyad rgal brtag sogs kyi chos so so'i gting dpogs par mdzad ste/ slob dpon rin po che kyang 'di lta bu'i thugs kyi brtson pa dang mkhyen pa ces bsngags par mdzad/.*

<sup>142</sup> It is evident that the Karmapa respected Karma 'phrin las pa greatly: he is said to have carried a piece of his hair with him continuously (*Kam tshang*, 1972 edition, p. 651). Karma 'phrin las pa also foretold the Karmapa's vast activities; Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bsal pa'i khrid*, fol. 3a (p. 119): 'The venerable 'Phrin las pa said: "For the one holding the name of Karmapa, the [Buddha] activity will become greater and greater; [namely the Buddha activity] which proclaims

practices.<sup>143</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub adds that the Karmapa, through the final studies with Karma 'phrin las pa, found the confidence (*spobs pa*) to teach, debate, and compose on the scriptures studied.<sup>144</sup> *Kaṃ tshang* recounts that the Karmapa emphasised study and reflection from his tenth year onwards and from his twenty-third year was not distracted from meditation under any circumstances.<sup>145</sup>

The Karmapa met the eighty-four year old Karma 'phrin las pa for a last time in 1538 in dBus. On that occasion the Karmapa received further teachings from the bKa' brgyud, Bo dong, Jo nang, and Zhwa lu traditions.<sup>146</sup>

When recounting how he paid respect to these four qualified teachers, the Eighth Karmapa praised their qualities: they would not—like most teachers 'these days' (*deng sang*)—just act in order to receive veneration and respect. He continues explaining that the main cause of Buddhahood is receiving instructions on higher knowledge from one's teacher, and that one should rely on a teacher until one has attained enlightenment.<sup>147</sup> Yet the Karmapa's education was not limited to what he learned under his four main teachers.<sup>148</sup> On later visits to the main monasteries in dBus and

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extensively in any direction the name of Karmapa, which in [this] time has come upon you!" (*rje 'phrin las pas/ karma pa'i mtshan 'dzin pa cig la khyed cag dus la dpags pa'i karma pa'i mtshan phyogs med du rgyas par sgrogs pa'i 'phrin las ches che bar 'ong zhes bka' stsal ba dang/*).

<sup>143</sup> In *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4a.5 (p. 356), for example, the Karmapa used the name 'Great Yogi of the Great Seal Karma 'phrin las pa' (*phyag rgya chen po'i mal 'byor pa chen po karma 'phrin las pa*). Apart from those described in the translated passage above, Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 24a (p. 196), further specifies the tantric transmissions the Karmapa had received from Karma 'phrin las pa: Hevajra and Tārā, and further profound teaching such as the 'Oral transmission of the Karma [bKa' brgyud]' (*karma snyan rgyud*). The whole passage of what and how Karmapa studied with Karma 'phrin las pa is strikingly similar to the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*.

<sup>144</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 24a (p. 196).

<sup>145</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1258; *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 328 f. Their reading varies slightly.

<sup>146</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 24a (p. 196), just reads 'later in dBus'. Their last meeting is the only second meeting documented and it probably took place in dBus (see also *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 340). This last meeting is described touchingly in the last lines of the spiritual biography of Karma 'phrin las pa the Eighth Karmapa composed (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun karma 'phrin las pa'i rnam thar*, fol. 7a).

<sup>147</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar la bslab pa'i khrid*, fol. 3b (p. 120).

<sup>148</sup> The narratives are replete with spiritual songs of realisation and visions (in particular *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*), depicting a visionary relationship to a Buddha or Buddhist master. Sometimes these visions are said to deepen understanding of the Great Seal. Among others,

gTsang he relied on numerous tutors from the emerging schools of dGe lugs, Sa skya, rNying ma, Jo nang, 'Bri gung, sTag lung, and Zhwa lu.<sup>149</sup>

#### 4.1.5 Scholastic Contributions (1530–1550)

The remainder of the Eighth Karmapa's life is summarised here. The sources portray it as a succession of the typical deeds of a Buddhist scholar and meditation master: teaching, composition, and debate; interrupted by periods of further study and meditation, pilgrimage, or the founding of monasteries, scriptural seminaries (*bshad grwa*), and meditation centres (*sgrub sde*).

In 1530, the Karmapa studied grammar extensively with Karma Lo tsā ba Rin chen bkra shis (b. fifteenth century) in rNam thos kyi ri bo in (Kong po); the notes he took were later compiled into an extensive commentary in the sGo lha khang in Tsa ri.<sup>150</sup> After the customary ceremonies and prayers for the Tibetan New Year of the hare year (1531) in Zu ru gdong, the Karmapa expounded various sūtric lessons to a large assembly from Kong po: instructions on the Vinaya, Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* as well as the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*.<sup>151</sup> Upon meeting his important 'moon like student' dPa bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba for the first time, the Karmapa imparted the instructions on the six doctrines of Nāro, and to sDe bdun rab 'byams pa Phyogs glang those of the Or rgyan bsnyen grub.<sup>152</sup>

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*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 335, recounts a vision of Mañjuśrī, saying that the Karmapa received teachings on the stages of the Great Seal meditation of the *dohā*, including points on inner energies.

<sup>149</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1241.

<sup>150</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 123; *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 337; Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 6a (p. 340). For the notes, see the Eighth Karmapa's *Zhwa lu lo tsā ba chos skong bzang po*, fol. 248a (p. 495). It is his commentary on Zhwa lu Lo tsā ba Chos skyong bzang po's (1441–1527/38) commentary. Indian grammar (*kalāpa*) as understood by the Tibetans usually refers to the *Kalāpasūtra* (*Q*, no. 5775, *le* fol. 91a7–110b3/ vol. 140, pp. 38–46).

<sup>151</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 337.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* p. 337. 'O rgyan bsnyen grub originates with the siddha 'O rgyan pa and is connected to the Kālacakra. It began to disintegrate in the fourteenth century (Kapstein 1996: 280). The Karmapa also taught the general explanations of the Buddhist tantras by Bu ston, while to a larger assembly the Karmapa transmitted the empowerments of the five tantra classes (*Kaṃ tshang* p. 338).

In 1532, the Karmapa authored a commentary on the *Vinayasūtra*<sup>153</sup> and began a more extensive one on the *Abhidharmakośa* (1532–1543) in Kong po.<sup>154</sup> Additionally, some works on tantric practice were set down in writing: in 1532 he composed a short treatise on the tantras and an exposition of the five stages (Skt. *pañcakrāma*) of yogic practice.<sup>155</sup> In 1533, he authored instructions for the completion stage, the six yogas of Cakrasaṃvara.<sup>156</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising that it was only in 1537 that the Karmapa set out to approach traditional main centres of dBus and gTsang. The Phag mo gru pa had regained some force and local skirmishes prevailed, especially in Kong po, dBus, and gTsang. In 1534 people from Phrag, probably local sponsors or followers of the Karmapa and Zhwa dmar pa gathered an army in order to destroy the dGe lugs monasteries in Kong po and the other donors and lamas (*yon mchod*) fled. According to *Kaṃ tshang*, the Karmapa averted the danger by explaining: ‘there is no difference between harming a small dGe lugs establishment and cutting [one’s] throat.’<sup>157</sup>

The Karmapa’s ensuing journey to dBus would be seen not only as a religious pilgrimage but one which held political overtones: the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa had passed away, and the Eighth Karmapa had then to fill the power vacuum left in and around Lhasa after the departure of the Rin spungs pa to gTsang. The first dBus based monastery visited was ’Bri gung. Having spent the New year of the ape year (1536) in Kong po, the Karmapa visited Lho brag, Dwags po, rTsa ri, and finally arrived in ’Bri gung monastery, most likely accompanied by dPa’ bo Rin po che and the Fifth

<sup>153</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje’i rnam thar*, fol. 5b (p. 339).

<sup>154</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Chos mngon pa’i mdzod kyi ’grel pa* (*Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, vols. 10, 11). He composed the first part of this commentary in his twenty-fourth year (1532) in Kong po after he had studied it in 1528 with Karma ’phrin las pa. He based himself on the commentary by mChims Nam mkha’ grags (1253–1290). Encouraged by Karma ’phrin las pa, he wrote in his thirty-third year (1539) the second part in Nyug rGyal khang and finished it in his thirty-seventh year (1543) on a mountain slope of the Yar lha Sham po-mountain (in Lho kha) (*ibid.*, vol. 10, fol. 384bf./p. 766f. and vol. 11, fol. 502b/p. 1004).

<sup>155</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe yid bzang rtse ba’i rgyud gsum gsang ba*, 25 fols, and Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Slob dpon dbyangs can bzang pos nye bar stsal ba’i dril bu rim pa lnga pa’i khrid*, 103 fols. The scribe for the latter text was dPa’ bo gTsong lag phreng ba (*ibid.* fol. 103a/p. 981).

<sup>156</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *dPal sdom pa’i yan lag drug gi rgyas ’grel gyi khrid rnal ’byor gyi sa chen po grub pa dbyangs can bzhad pas sbyar ba*, 92 fols.

<sup>157</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 338: *dge ldan pa’i khang chung zhig la gnod pa byed pa dang mgul bregs pa khyad med*.

Zhwa dmar pa.<sup>158</sup> In 'Bri gung monastery, he exchanged questions with Paṇ chen rdor rgyal ba, met the fifteenth abbot of 'Bri gung, sKyu ra rin po che Rin chen rnam rgyal (1527–1570) and the local lord Bya bKra shis dar rgyas.<sup>159</sup> The Karmapa transmitted empowerments of Cakrasaṃvara and meditation instructions (*khrid*) of the oral transmission of Ras chung pa to the 'Bri gung Rin po che, Paṇ chen rdo rgyal ba, and the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa.

In the branch monastery 'Bri gung thel, the Karmapa expounded on the 'Bri gung pa's famous 'one intention' (*dgongs gcig*) doctrine. dPa bo Rin po che made notes (*zin bris*) of these lessons.<sup>160</sup> The Karmapa's extensive commentaries on the one intention doctrine, including spiritual biographies of 'Bri gung pa 'Jigs rten gsum dgon, documents his keen interest in the subject.<sup>161</sup>

The 'Bri gung abbot and the Zhwa dmar Rin po che continued to travel with the Karmapa in an assembly of lamas to Legs bshad gling.<sup>162</sup> There he instructed them in the 'innate union of the Great Seal' (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor*) and passed on reading transmission of the collection of Lama Zhang's writings (*bka' 'bum*).<sup>163</sup> The Karmapa proceeded to the seat of the Zhwa dmar pa in dBus, Yang pa can, and later to the monastery of sTag

<sup>158</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 338.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* p. 339. He also met Bya 'Jam dbyangs chos rje, a local ruler of the southern area of Bya, which had already sponsored the Seventh Karmapa and First Karma 'phrin las pa. Both Paṇ chen rdor rgyal ba and Bya pa Chos rje are characterised as students of Śākya mchog ldan (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1239).

<sup>160</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 339. This is probably the commentary to the first section (*tshoms dang po*) dPal rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje, 128 fols. It was composed from notes (*zin bris*) dPa' bo Rin po che had made of the Karmapa's teaching on the fifteen points (*gnad rim bco lnga*) of the *dgongs gcig* in the presence of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, dKon mchog yan lag. The Karmapa's *dGongs gcig gi gsung bzhi bcu'i 'grel pa*, 106 fols, was composed in the same year (1536). As for the Karmapa's other 'one intention' commentaries, some may have been written during this period in 'Bri gung and some were evidently composed later, such as the *dGongs gcig gi kar ſik chen mo las 'bras bu'i tshom* in 1545 (which may, in fact, contain the colophon for the remaining undated texts).

<sup>161</sup> In the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, this material encompasses three volumes (vol. 4–6) amounting to around one thousand two hundred folios. These commentaries are not seen as standard interpretation in the 'Bri gung tradition (Sobisch, oral communication, August 2006, Bonn). A song documents the Karmapa's travel to dBus and gTsang and his stay in 'Bri gung (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gSer 'phyang me bya'i lo dngun lo sum cu pa*).

<sup>162</sup> A monastery founded by the First Karma 'phrin las pa in 1504, probably in the area of Dwags po. By 1536 Karma 'phrin las pa had retired from that position after appointing Shes rab rnam rgyal as abbot (Rheingans 2004: 70–71, 86).

<sup>163</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 339.



lung.<sup>164</sup> Yet before progressing to mTshur phu, the Eighth Karmapa travelled north of sTag lung to the dGe lugs seat of Ra sgren. Si tu Rin po che remarks that the Second Dalai Lama himself, dGe 'dun rgya mtsho (1476–1542), and his student bSod nams grags pa (1478–1554) sent a letter, in which they respectfully requested a meeting with the Karmapa.<sup>165</sup> There is no mention of any differences.

Finally, after another visit of Yang pa can, the Karmapa reached mTshur phu in the first month of the bird year (1537).<sup>166</sup> He gave extensive dharma lessons, celebrated the New Year of the following dog year (1538) in mTshur phu, and remained in retreat for some time.<sup>167</sup> When the Karmapa was invited by the sNe'u gdong pa (the Phag mo gru pa ruler), he gave the local people an Avalokiteśvara-empowerment and explicated the great treatises to those of bright intellect (*blo gsal*) from an encampment college (*grwa tshang*). It documents his relations to the resurgent Phag mo gru pa; and the Karmapa, who was by that time a powerful hierarch, issued a letter trying to mediate in the war between dBus and gTsang.<sup>168</sup>

After meeting his attendant and biographer Sangs rgyas dpal grub, the Karmapa stayed in a close retreat for the winter of 1538/39 and imparted on some students a series of tantric and key Great Seal meditation instructions: the mountain teachings (*ri chos*) of Yang dgon pa, the six doctrines of

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. p. 340.

<sup>165</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 340. bSod nams grags pa was abbot of dGa' ldan from 1529 to 1535 and thus an important dGe lugs scholar ([www.tbrc.org](http://www.tbrc.org), 03.07.2007).

<sup>166</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 344.

<sup>167</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Dang por gdan sa chen po mthsur phu phebs ma thag bzhuks du kyi gsung mgur*, fol. 1b (p. 350). Further songs documenting his travels in dBus and gTsang (the first one dating to 1538): Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, 'Di phyin dbus gtsang gi rgyal khams chen por zhabs kyi 'khor lo ris med du bskyod du kyi gsung mgur.

<sup>168</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 341. A so far undated epistle to the sNe'u gdong pa is found in the Karmapa's writings, which may relate to that event: Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bod rgyal po chen po'i rgyal thabs kyi mdzad pa gnam du byas pa sne'u sdong rgyal po la gnam ba rin po che'i 'phreng ba'o*. This letter indeed bears testimony of how the Karmapa handled the relation to this ruler. At first the Karmapa outlines the history of the dharma in Tibet, in particular with regards to the various sponsors and how they furnished the spread of the teaching, such as the early kings, the Sa skya pa and later the Ming kings (through the Karmapa) and even Tai Situ Byang chub rgyal mtshan. Then he laments the state of affairs today (*deng sang*, fol. 3b ff./p. 48ff.) saying that both patrons and priests (*mchod yon*) act negatively, not to mention the ordinary people. This had led to huge amounts of suffering. It seems that he tries to pacify the sNe'u mdong ruler by this kind of epistle. At the end he impresses upon the king some rules from the time of Srong btsan sgam po (605–650). Further textual hints are found in the colophone to the Eighth Karmapa's *sNying po don gsum gyi don khrid*, fol. 13b (p. 559). It, for example, adds that the dharma-politics (*chos srid*) of Phag mo gru may spread.

Nāropa, the 'inseparability of energy-winds and mind' (*rlung sems gnyis med*), the innate union (of the Great Seal), the oral lineage of Ras chung pa, the O rgyan bsnyen grub, the One taste Gang dril (*ro snyoms gang dril*), and the 'seven point mind training' (*blo sbyong don bdun ma*). It seems likely that various meditation manuals were composed at this retreat.<sup>169</sup>

Thereafter the Karmapa travelled to the gTsang province of Central-Western Tibet for the first time, where he, among others, met a Bo dong pa and travelled to g.Yag sde. Upon his return to dBus, he made a pilgrimage to the dGa' ldan Pho brang.<sup>170</sup> The Karmapa continued to strengthen his ties to local rulers in Dwags po and Kong po and frequently visited his sponsors from Dwags po sKu rab.<sup>171</sup> In the monastery of Legs bshad gling he ordained the young Fifth Zhwa dmar pa and transmitted empowerments and meditation instructions (*khrid*) to monks, local rulers, and ministers. He was invited to Dwags po sKu rab in 1543.<sup>172</sup>

During the later years of his life, significant writings were authored. Between 1544 and 1546, the Karmapa completed his *Abhidharmakośa* commentary, composed a further work on the 'Bri gung pa's one intention doctrine,<sup>173</sup> and created his monumental treatise on the *Madhyamakāvatāra*.<sup>174</sup> It is worthwhile to briefly note the circumstances for the composition of this influential treatise. Previous research has noted the possible significance of Se ra brJe btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan's (1469–

<sup>169</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 341. The place mentioned is a hermitage in sKung (*skung gi ri khrod*). So far undated texts may fit into the instructions imparted: for example the Eighth Karmapa's *rJe rgod tshang ba'i ro snyoms sgang dril*, *Blo sbyong gi khrid* and the *rGyal ba yang dgon pa'i ngo sprod bdun ma'i khrid yig*. This last mentioned text was composed in a retreat place near mTshur phu, suggesting that this could be the hermitage where the instructions were given (ibid. fol. 11b/p. 581). The Karmapa probably stayed until the Tibetan New Year of the pig year (1539) in which he authored another spiritual memoir (*Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *rJe mi bskyod rdo rje'i 'phral gyi rnam thar tshigs su bcad pa nyer bdun pa rje nyid kyis mdzad pa*).

<sup>170</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 341.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. p. 344.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *dGongs gcig gi kar 'ik chen mo las 'bras bu'i tshom*.

<sup>174</sup> He set out to compose the *Madhyamaka* commentary in the end of 1544, beginning of 1545. The colophon states the Eighth Karmapa began this work in his thirty-ninth year in a mountain valley of Byar smad skyid phug and completed it in a dwelling called Mon sha 'ug stag sgo dom tshang ngur mo rong (*Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 486a/p. 973). According to *Kam tshang*, p. 344, he did the prayers for the Tibetan New Year of the snake year some time after starting to compose this text. As the Karmapa's thirty-ninth birthday was on the 18 Nov 1544 and the Tibetan New Year on 13 Jan 1545 (both according to the mTshur phu tradition) it must have been during that period.

1546) earlier critique of Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* interpretation along the lines of *gzhan stong* and *nam rdzun* ('false aspectarian') Madhyamaka.<sup>175</sup> However, the exhortation by his teacher Chos grub seng ge to compose the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* commentary (explained above) and the need to continue the work of the Seventh Karmapa has been left almost unnoticed.<sup>176</sup>

Similarly, one particular source of inspiration has been overlooked for his *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*: the crazy yogin Lama Zhang. Si tu Paṇ chen's *Kaṃ tshang* recounts that, through Lama Zhang's blessing (*byin gyis brlabs*), the Karmapa settled the ultimate Madhyamaka view (*mthar thug dbu ma*) to be the tradition of *prāsaṅga* or 'consequentialists'. Being himself inspired by the *gzhan stong*,<sup>177</sup> Si tu Paṇ chen viewed the Eighth Karmapa's commentary as chiefly in conformity with the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje, which he interprets as *gzhan stong*.<sup>178</sup>

An interlinear comment (*mchan*) from the Eighth Karmapa's *Dwags po bka' brgyud kyi bzahag thabs shig* (*Method to Settle [the mind] of the Dwags po bka' brgyud*) offers a more prosaic explanation. When the Eighth Karmapa calls himself blessed by the First Karmapa and Lama Zhang, the interlinear commentary remarks that while the Karmapa first adhered to the 'false aspectarian' (*nam rdzun pa*) view of Cittamātra, later, because he had seen the *Lam mchog mthar thug* (*The Path of Ultimate Profoundity*)<sup>179</sup> by Lama Zhang, he turned to Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka and took Zhang as his root guru.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Chos kyi rGyal mtshan, Se ra rJe btsun, *Kar len glu sgrub dgongs rgyan*, fol. 20b (see also Ruegg 1988: 1271–1272, 1275 and Lopez 1996: 221).

<sup>176</sup> Brunnhölzl (2004: 913, n. 1039), in a footnote, took notice briefly with the help of the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1236.

<sup>177</sup> Si tu Paṇ chen was inspired to the *gzhan stong* view by his teacher Kaḥ thog Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755) (Smith 2001: 87–99, Stearns 1999: 74f.).

<sup>178</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 344: *byang skyid phug tu phebs/ zhang g.yu brag pas byin gyis brlabs pa'i snang ba byung ba mthar thug dbu ma'i 'jog 'tshams thal 'gyur 'thad pa'i lugs su gzhe'd nas/ 'jug pa'i tīk chen brtsams mdzad cing thal 'gyur pa'i gzhung 'dzugs par gnang na'ang gtso bor ni rje rang byung zhabs kyi dgongs pa gzhan stong gtso bor mdzad pa'o/ mdzod 'grel la zhus dag gnang/ sprul lo'i smon lam chen po mdzad/*

<sup>179</sup> Zhang Tshal pa brTson 'grus grags, *Phyag rgya chen po lam zab mthar thug zhang gi man ngag*. The text has been translated and commented on by Martin (1992, translation 255–295), and was composed in an earlier part of Zhang's life. However, it already reflects the Great Seal teaching he received from sGam po pa's nephew, Dwags po sGom tshul, and resembles the Indian Buddhist songs of non-dual realisation (ibid. 254).

<sup>180</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Dwags po bka' brgyud kyi bzahag thabs shig*, fol. 7b (p. 734). The author of this interlinear remark, most likely an editor of the various versions of the Eighth Karmapa's writings, remains obscure.

*Lam mchog mthar thug*, a Great Seal instruction resembling a tantric song and focusing on the ineffability of mind, was not considered a highly scholastic commentary. Yet, much like the *Chariot of the Dwags po Siddhas* (*Dwags pa'i sgrub pa'i shing rta*) it is concerned with removing what the Karmapa considered wrong views and indicates the importance of the direct experience of emptiness.<sup>181</sup> In the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, three more texts exhibit evidence of the inspiration of Lama Zhang.<sup>182</sup>

These historical and literary contexts add to our understanding of how the composition of such commentaries was explicated within the textual material by and about the Eighth Karmapa, challenging a tendency to explain such issues from a purely doctrinal or even political perspective.<sup>183</sup> Regarding the Karmapa's development, the attacks of previous masters' views, such as the perceived novelty of Tsong kha pa's interpretation of Madhyamaka, bear testimony of Mi bskyod rdo rje's ability to use the tools of Buddhist logic and exhibit a direct, sometimes ironic, style of debate.<sup>184</sup> The Karmapa's manner of debate is further reflected in his polemics against the rNying ma pa's understanding of the all base consciousness (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*), composed after the beginning of the ox year (1553), near Byams pa gling.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>181</sup> See Chapter Six (6.1), for some of the Great Seal contributions of this treatise.

<sup>182</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Zhang 'gro ba'i mgon po g.yu brag pa'i dam chos bka' rgya mar grags pa*. The first lines (ibid. fol. 1b/p. 576) praise the Karmapa's main teacher Sangs rgyas mnyan pa as being Lama Zhang outwardly (*phyi*), the First Karmapa inwardly (*nam*), secretly (*gsang*) the Great Seal, and on the level of suchness (*de kho na nyid*) the great bliss (*bde ba chen po*). This work can be considered a Guru Yoga invocation ritual and Great Seal instruction. *Zhang 'gro ba'i mgon po'i gsang ba'i rnam thar bka' rgya las 'phros pa'i gsang ba'i gtam yang dag pa*, continues this topic: the text starts out with a guru yoga on Lama Zhang who is depicted as the Buddha Cakrasaṃvara. Interestingly, passages in this invocation bear similarity to *Zhang bka' rgya'i brgyud rim gsol 'debs*, fol. 1a (p. 894) and are almost identical with a passage in the Eighth Karmapa's *Thun bzhi'i bla ma'i rnal 'byor*.

<sup>183</sup> Williams (1983a: 125) assumes: 'There can be little doubt that Mi bskyod rdo rje was concerned to establish firmly the Abhidharma and Sūtrayāna teachings of the Karma bKa' brgyud in active and crusading opposition to the systematic and sophisticated interpretations dGe lugs pa scholars were presenting.' Although the Karmapa's scholastic aspirations and the debate with Se ra rJe btsun are undoubtable, they may be the sole reason for explicating a commentary issued much later. There can also be some doubt, as to whether the Karmapa's motive was to establish a 'crusading opposition' or whether he was simply debating. It can also be asked why the dGe lugs pa texts are described as 'systematic and sophisticated', suggesting that other schools would not have the capacity for such achievements.

<sup>184</sup> Williams (1983a: 126–127), Brunnhölzl (2004: 553–597).

<sup>185</sup> The Karmapa had visited Atiśa's seat Rwa greng and stayed in the dGe lugs monastery Byams pa gling, where he read the writings of the scholar of Byams pa gling, bSod nams

Major literary works were authored in mTshur phu, where the Karmapa spent the New Year of the ape year (1548). He gave empowerments of the five tantra baskets of the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud lineage and a lengthy treatise on the *yoga-tantras* was completed.<sup>186</sup> Still in mTshur phu, the Karmapa started to compose extensive instructions on the *sKu gsum ngo sprod* (*Pointing out the Three [Buddha] Bodies*).<sup>187</sup> In summary, the 1540s and early 1550s can be considered the mature years of the Eighth Karmapa as author of both tantric and sūtric commentaries.

During these years, the Karmapa continued his travels and occasional political conflicts surfaced.<sup>188</sup> In 1547, when the Rin spungs pa prepared for war in rGyal rtse, the Karmapa issued a letter to prevent them—to no avail. According to *Kaṃ tshang*, in about 1552 sNe'u gdong minister of the Phag mo gru pa asked the Karmapa to pacify fightings in the Yar klung valley and invited the Eighth Karmapa to grant protection.<sup>189</sup> This was probably

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nam rgyal (1401–1475), student of the famed Bo dong Paṇ chen (1376–1451) (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 349; for bSod nams nam rgyal, see Smith 2001: 180). Shortly thereafter, in a retreat of Byams pa gling, the polemics were composed (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gSang sngags snga 'gyur las 'phros pa'i brgal lan*; see also Karmay 1988: 181–182, for the points of critique; see Kapstein 1989: 230, for a further mentioning). The authenticity of the Karmapa's work and its circumstances need to be treated with care: the first lines state (ibid. fol. 1b/p. 351) one of Karmapa's previous critiques to the rNying ma pa was done by someone posing in his name and the Karmapa wishes to clarify the situation (Ringu Tulku 2006: 161 is of the same opinion). The editor of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, Karma bde legs, recounts that according to Sog lzog pa's *Dris lan lung dang rig pa'i 'brug sgra*, the Eighth Karmapa wrote this work in order to motivate the rNying ma pa to study, reflect, and meditate on their own view. Karma bDe legs further mentions stories in the monasteries in Khams about two texts with the name Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje: *rNying ma la rtsod pa mi bskyod dgag yig* and his own answer to that, the *Mi bskyod rang len*. However, the team of Karma bDe legs has found three versions of the text in question: one in 'Bras spungs, one in Nyag rong, and one in Ri bo che (Karma bde legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 48–49).

<sup>186</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 346. The commentary is: Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rNal 'byor kyi nam par bshad pa thar 'dod grol ste*, 371 fols.

<sup>187</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *sKu gsum ngo sprod kyi nam par bshad*, colophone in vol. 22, p. 758–759. The colophon mentions sponsorship by a Lha phu ba, who also offered the Karmapa a monastery. The text was completed in 1549 in Thob rGyal dGra 'dul gling in gTsang Zab phu lung. Zab phu lung is an important pilgrimage site of Padmasambhava and known for its hot springs (Dorje 1999: 251). On that occasion the Karmapa also composed ritual for the practice of the female aspect Sitāpatra (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *'Phags pa gtsug gtor gdugs dkar gyi mngon rtogs dang dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*).

<sup>188</sup> His travels included a further visit to 'Jang sa tham in 1552 with the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 348).

<sup>189</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 348.

meant to keep the local lords of the neighbouring Yar klung valley in check and consequently, the Karmapa issued a letter to each of the rulers which led to the successful pacifying of all wars in Yar klung.<sup>190</sup>

#### 4.1.6 Travel to rTsa ri, Sickness, and Passing Away

During his last years, after 1553, the Karmapa made a pilgrimage to rTsa ri, one of Tibet's most revered pilgrimage sites.<sup>191</sup> At first, the deepening of his training is illustrated by the transformation of the ordinary body into the wisdom body (*jñānakāya*) via yogic exercises, accompanied by vast visions of Vajrayoginī and Cakrasaṃvara, Padmasambhava, Lama Zhang, and other Karmapas.<sup>192</sup>

While the Karmapa continued to visit sacred places of the site, various songs of realisation were uttered;<sup>193</sup> the Karmapa composed texts (*thugs brtsams*), and taught the Great Seal. He instructed his disciples gathered at the Bod rdo hot springs (*mthsan khar*) in the meditation instructions for the *rGod tshang pa'i dge sbyor bdun ma'i khrid* (*Seven Applications to Virtue of rGod tshang pa*) and imparted to some monks from dBus ma Brag dkar the meditation instructions of the 'innate union of the Great Seal' (*lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid*) on the basis of a text composed by the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa.<sup>194</sup>

While in rTsa ri, the Karmapa suffered an injury to his right shoulder (*sku dpung*) in the ninth month of the ox year (1553), and indicated that his life was about to end.<sup>195</sup> Due to the Karmapa's sickness, the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa apparently started to take over some responsibilities after the New Year of the tiger year (1554). The political atmosphere was still charged,

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. p. 349.

<sup>191</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 350. Situated near mount Dag pa shel ri, rTsa ri as sacred place was inspired by Phag mo gru pa and gTsang pa rgya re Ye shes rdo rje (1161–1211). It became particularly important for the bKa' brgyud schools and hosts sacred places of one of their essential Buddha aspects, Cakrasaṃvara (Dorje 1999: 224–225). The Karmapa went there after a short visit to the hot springs in Yar 'brog.

<sup>192</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 350. It is also recounted that the Karmapa told stories of his previous life-times (ibid. p. 351).

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. mentions the *bKa' bzhi seng chen ma'i mgur*, which has not yet been found in any of the title lists. In the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, we find a title indicating that this song was composed while he was sick in rTsa ri, Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rJe btsun mi bskyod rdo rje de nyid dgung lo bzhi bcu zhe bdun pa la tsa ri'i phebs tshun gyi gsung mgur rnams*.

<sup>194</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 351.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

and when armies came to Dwags po from Kong po the Zhwa dmar pa had to reconcile the parties. Meanwhile, the Karmapa's retinue requested their lama to journey to upper rTsa ri, so he proceeded to the area of his fervent supporters in the sKu rab pa family (in Dwags po, Southern Tibet) and then to bShad sgrub gling.<sup>196</sup>

When a dangerous leprosy epidemic broke out in Southern Tibet, its cause was identified as *nāga*-spirit (*klu bdud*).<sup>197</sup> As one of his last deeds, the Karmapa visited those people, who were unable to reach him due to their illness. The ensuing taming of the *nāga* is a metaphor similar to the legend of Padmasambhava subduing the female earth-demon of Tibet for founding of the monastery bSam yas.<sup>198</sup> At the centre of the *nāga* the Karmapa put a temple with a large statue. In the statue's life tree at the heart level he placed some remains of the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakṣi, who was renowned for his magical powers in subduing evil forces.<sup>199</sup> Four black stūpas were then erected to conquer the 'four limbs' (*yan lag*) of the *nāga*. The already-ill Karmapa took the remainder of the epidemic upon himself in order to avert the danger for other beings.<sup>200</sup> Accordingly, in the eighth month of that year, the signs of his sickness increased.<sup>201</sup>

Notably, some of the last instructions the Eighth Karmapa imparted concerned the Great Seal. In the eighth month of that tiger year (1554), due to his sickness, monks invited him from gSang sngags gling to come on a palanquin and the Karmapa prayed for the local population's swift healing from the epidemic. He taught meditation instructions of the Great Seal (*phyag chen gyi khrid*) to those carrying the palanquin. Proceeding to bSam sde, his health briefly improved and he again performed certain sermons.<sup>202</sup>

<sup>196</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 352. The last documented work the Karmapa composed in the seventh lunar month of that year was a ritual describing the consecration of one hundred and eight stūpas connected to the Buddha aspect (*vid dam*) Uṣṇīṣa-sitātapatra (*gtsug gtor gdugs dkar*); it was probably composed in sKu rab: Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gTsug gtor dri med nas gsungs pa'i mchod rten brgya rtsa brgyad mchod pa'i cho ga*, 28 fols. The place was the palace of sKu rab of the king (*sa skyong*) of the Eastern part of Tibet (ibid. fol. 28a/p. 711).

<sup>197</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 353.

<sup>198</sup> Blondeau and Gyatso (2003: 17), Kapstein (2006b: 70). For an assessment of the various theories about the supine demoness and an account of its geomantic underpinnings, see Mills (2007: 1–4); for the concept of taming the local powers of Tibet, see also Samuel (1993: 169).

<sup>199</sup> Kapstein (2000: 97–106); Thinley (1980: 52).

<sup>200</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 353.

<sup>201</sup> The sources use the Tibetan words *tshul* or *rnam pa* for the sickness, indicating that he rather 'showed' sickness or appeared to be sick than being sick in a conventional sense.

<sup>202</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 353.

After a vision of the siddha Birvapa and prophecies (related in *Kaṃ tshang*) about the next rebirth, the Karmapa passed away in his forty-eighth year, around noon of the twenty-third day in the eighth month of the tiger year (1554).<sup>203</sup>

The body (*sku gdung*) of the deceased master was brought to mTshur phu.<sup>204</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che made offerings for the completion of his master's activity (*dgongs rdzogs*) and the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa had been made the Karmapa's successor and regent (*rgyal tshab*).<sup>205</sup> These two were the Eighth Karmapa's most important successors.<sup>206</sup>

#### 4.2 The Eighth Karmapa: 'Learned and Accomplished One' of his Day

The spiritual biographies and memoirs portray the Eighth Karmapa after the ideal of a 'learned and accomplished one' (*mkhas sgrub*), an accomplished scholar and realised meditator, an ideal characteristic for important religious hierarchs in late medieval Tibet.<sup>207</sup> The scholastic, yogic, and political roles embodied by the Karmapa are represented in the sources from the outset.

Three centuries earlier, sGam po pa had exemplified the monasticisation of lay tantric lineages within the bKa' brgyud schools in the twelfth cen-

<sup>203</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355, describes his death 'showing the way of gathering the mandala of an emanation' (*sprul sku'i dkyil 'khor bsdu ba'i tshul bstan*). Shortly before, the Karmapa had predicted his next rebirth, a feature peculiar to spiritual biographies of incarnate lamas. *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355, explains that he put the prophecy into writing but did not relate it to his attendants (*sku 'khor*) directly. The last place mentioned is a g.Yag sde monastery, which is probably not the g.Yag sde in gTsang (ibid. 253).

<sup>204</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 355; receptacles of his body and speech were erected at other places, too (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1324). Most Tibetan Buddhist traditions consider the body of a deceased master to be an object of veneration and a source of relics (Martin 1994: 1).

<sup>205</sup> Martin (1994: 4) has rendered the term *ren* as 'receptacle'; it may alternatively be translated as 'support, dependency, container'. Central to the idea of the 'three receptacles' of body, speech, and mind of a Buddha or a saint is their ability to convey blessing or spiritual influence (*byin rlabs*).

<sup>206</sup> *Kaṃ tshang* p. 337. For the student lists see also *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 356; *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1332–33; they also include the respective rGyal tshab Grags pa dpal 'byor and Si tu Chos kyi 'od zer. *Kaṃ tshang* (p. 356) distinguished into students who 'uphold the teaching of exposition and practice' (*bshad sgrub kyi bstan pa 'dzin pa*), who are 'endowed with realisation' (*rtogs ldan*) and those in 'whose [mind] the blessing has entered and who [successfully] practice service [to the teacher]' (*byin rlabs zhugs shing zhabs tog bsgrub pa*).

<sup>207</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 231 and 2000: 19).



tury.<sup>208</sup> From then on, Tibetan Buddhism tended to unite Buddhist tantrism with Mahāyāna monasticism, though different schools often kept particular tendencies coloured by their main origin.<sup>209</sup> The Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje, can be seen as a role model and the starting point of the Karma bKa' brgyud scholastic systematisation.<sup>210</sup> And it is the Third Karmapa who is a recurring theme that connects the Eighth Karmapa to his possible role model as Karma bKa' brgyud scholar.<sup>211</sup> While the Eighth Karmapa was a Great Seal yogin and teacher of mysticism, he was by no means a representative of the fifteenth-century *smyon pa* phenomenon prevalent among the bKa' brgyud traditions: 'holy madmen' such as gTsang smyon He ru ka, dBus smyon Kun dga' bzang po (1458–1532), and 'Brug smyon Kun dga' legs pa (1455–1529), formed a counterpart to the scholastic monks' hereditary religious nobility.<sup>212</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa was seen to embody various roles. One of these was the incarnate lama. Rooted with the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage of the thirteenth century, the incarnation system had become formalised, freeing monastic orders from the institution of family inheritance. The system was

<sup>208</sup> Sherpa (2004: 79–94); Samuel (1993: 479–481).

<sup>209</sup> Samuel (1993: 3–24) introduces the terms 'shamanic and clerical Buddhism' and explains different attempts at synthesis such as the bKa' brgyud pa, dGe lug pa, and the nineteenth century *ris med* movement.

<sup>210</sup> For scholastic traditions, the fourteenth-century systematisation was the work of successive masters of the gSang phu and Sa skya. Scholars such as Klong chen Rab 'byams pa (1308–1363) (see Kapstein 2000: 97–105), Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361), and the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), were influenced by these traditions in developing their peculiar interpretations (for the Third Karmapa, see Schaeffer 1995: 6–25 and 72–110). The Sixth Karmapa, mThong ba don ldan (1416–1453), received most of his scholastic teaching from the famed Sa skya pa master Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367–1449), who, along with the gSang phu traditions, constituted a major source of the Karma bKa' brgyud sūtra exegesis (Brunnhölzl 2004: 19; for Śākya mchog ldan's education with Rong ston, see Caumanns 2006: 65–68). There were also masters more skeptical of scholastic ideas, such as the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakṣi (1206–1283), or the 'Bri gung 'Jigs ten dgon po (this is the thesis of Kapstein 2000: 101–106).

<sup>211</sup> The Third Karmapa is mentioned as a reference in the instructions the Eighth Karmapa received (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar rje nyid kyi rnam thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa*, fol. 3b (p. 335); see translation above, 121).

<sup>212</sup> Smith (2001: 59ff); Stein (1993: 170 ff.). Kögler (2004: 25–55) suggest social factors such as the absence of central political authority and the important role of the clergy. The *smyon pa* exemplified a return to the roots of the bKa' brgyud traditions: the close connection to the teacher, oral instructions, and meditation in solitude. Some are mentioned among the disciples of the Seventh Karmapa as 'kings of the yogis' (Skt. *yogeśvara*) (*Kaṃ tshang*, 1972 edition, p. 592). The spiritual biography of 'Brug smyon Kun dga' legs pa mentions that 'Brug smyon met the Eighth Karmapa and discovered him to be briefly distracted from his vows, which the Karmapa then confirmed (Dowman 1980: 230).

an innovation with advantages and problems, the latter clearly visible in the case of the Eighth Karmapa's selection. Families and monasteries were keen on having one of 'their' members obtain the title of a great reincarnate, a denomination cherished for its socio-political advantages.<sup>213</sup> On the other hand, the incarnation system provided security for the growth of scholasticism and was favoured by the secular rulers.<sup>214</sup> What, almost inevitably, followed was the involvement of religious hierarchs in political affairs, including the seeking of funding from wealthy and powerful patrons, who in turn aimed for dominance over a particular area of Tibet.

However, perhaps the most striking role the Karmapa held for his Karma bKa' brgyud tradition was that of the Buddhist scholar. The politics of reincarnation immersed the boy at an early age, and the five year old Karmapa reacted by resolving to seek out a genuine teacher and to study diligently. With regard to his studies, scholastic accomplishments, and the founding of institutes, the Eighth Karmapa continued the aims of his predecessor, the Seventh Karmapa, and tried to raise the educational standard of the Karma bKa' brgyud.<sup>215</sup> Both scholars of the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition and the number of his writings lend support to this claim.<sup>216</sup> In sheer number, they may be compared to those of Śākya mChog Idan

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<sup>213</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 105, 109). Wylie (1978: 581–582) argues that the concept of reincarnation *de facto* emerged with the Third Karmapa at the time of Mongol supremacy in order to replace the 'Khon family. It had the advantage of being free from patrimonial connections and a 'charisma of office'. Samuel (1993: 495–497) explains the concept of reincarnation emerging with the bKa' brgyud pa during the Mongol period as a political device, that would bring political and economical advantages to monasteries.

<sup>214</sup> According to Samuel (1993: 497) it was a method for synthesising the monk and shaman ideals. The dGe lugs pa quickly adopted the incarnation model and their two reincarnate lamas, the Dalai Lama and Paṇ chen Lama dominated Tibetan politics from the seventeenth century onwards (ibid. chapter 26).

<sup>215</sup> For the monasteries and centres of learning founded, see *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 10b–11b (p. 369–371). While the dGe lugs monastic education focused more on debate, the non dGe lugs schools developed commentarial schools (*bshad grwa*) stressing exegesis. This development took place after the fifteenth century (Dreyfus 2005a: 276–292). In general, one must distinguish between a lineage of spiritual instructions, passed down from teacher to student, and a religious school, which is an organised form of the studies and practices connected with a particular transmission lineage (Kapstein 1980: 139; 1995: 284, n. 2).

<sup>216</sup> mKhan po Nges don considered it a particular feature of the Eighth Karmapa, that he spread the doctrine mainly through *mchad nyan*, e.g. exposition and study of the Buddha's teaching (as practised in Tibet) (oral communication, March 2007).

(twenty-four volumes) and, most importantly, 'Brug chen Padma dKar po (twenty-four volumes).<sup>217</sup>

His scholastic proficiency is corroborated by a spiritual memoir: he mainly taught the five topics, e.g. Abhidharma, Pramāṇā, Prajñāpāramitā, and Madhyamaka, augmented by Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Tshad ma rigs gter*, the *sDom gsum rab dbye*, and the trainings of the Vinaya.<sup>218</sup> Further, he gave instructions on the view of Madhyamaka (*dbu ma'i lta khrid*) and explanations of the *Zab mo nang gi don*, the treatises of Maitreya and the scholastic corpus (*rigs tshogs*) of Nāgārjuna.<sup>219</sup> While scholastically challenging and using strong language in some of his writings, the summary of the Eighth Karmapa's life reveals his keen interest in different traditions of learning, as well as humbler overtones.<sup>220</sup> The Karmapa's intellectual engagement culminated in the composition of large scholastic treatises, the pinnacle of which was his Madhyamaka commentary. In it he explored the language of his opponents and the tools of Buddhist logic to the fullest, yet, he was clearly sceptical of overanalysing.<sup>221</sup>

This commentary and other writings were partially inspired by the Great Seal of the crazy yogin type Lama Zhang (or his writings), indicating the Karmapa's core inspiration in even the most scholastic of undertakings: teacher and transmitter of the Great Seal. Passages examined above account for his study and realisation of the Great Seal: his training under Sangs rgyas mnyan pa, and the tales of his realisation are woven into the narratives and illustrated with the usual visions and songs. They culminate in yogic practices in the last year of his life (1554) in rTsa ri. His yogic understanding is portrayed in dialogues as early as 1512 up to his final teaching of Great Seal instructions in 1554.

The Eighth Karmapa inherited political problems from his predecessor and had to deal with various conflicting interests. In the atmosphere of

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<sup>217</sup> Śākya mchog ldan, gSer mdog Paṇ chen, *The Complete Works*; Padma dkar po, *Collected works (gsung 'bum)*. Padma dkar po can be considered the central Great Seal exegete of the sixteenth century next to the Eighth Karmapa. A study of their political relation and a comparison of their doctrines is an object for future research.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. fol. 9b (p. 367).

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> The Eighth Karmapa's straightforward language is indicated at other occasions: around 1539, the Karmapa met Jo nang Kun dga' sgrol mchog (1507–1565/1566), a famed Jo nang pa master. This would have been his disciple prophesised as 'sun like', but the Karmapa used a few straightforward words in typical Khams pa fashion, the student ran away (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 342). The reason of not going to China has shown more personal traits, too.

<sup>221</sup> Williams (1983a: 129).

mounting tensions between dBus and gTsang and a developing sectarianism,<sup>222</sup> the Karmapa established ties with local rulers and kings, attaining a relatively dominant position for his school in Eastern Tibet, as well as in dBus and gTsang, though he held no formal political post. He had further established a patron-priest connection with the non-Tibetan kings of 'Jang Sa tham and Mon and was not only sponsored by the Rin spungs pa regents and the Bya, Yar klung, and Dwags po sku rab lords, but had developed closer ties to the resurgent Phag mo gru rulers than was previously assumed.<sup>223</sup> According to the sources, the Karmapa tried to appease various feuds and, though he was certainly politically involved, an attitude of scepticism is visible.

Sources are, on the whole, negative about the political state of affairs of the day. Though in a letter to the Phag mo gru ruler the Eighth Karmapa alluded positively to the patron-priest relationship at the time of the early Tibetan kings, most contemporary involvements were definitely not considered a Buddhist virtue.<sup>224</sup> Sangs rgya dpal grub, for instance, explains that people in Kong po, as in dBus and gTsang, behaved like animals, killing each other.<sup>225</sup>

Sangs rgyas dpal grub further criticises the state of monastic discipline (*tshul khrims*) and the liberating influence the Karmapa had on those entangled in conflict and the 'ocean of dispute' (*rtsod pa'i rgya mtsho*).<sup>226</sup> He explains that the dGe lugs pa and the Karma bKa' brgyud pa were not in accordance. The main reasons were not, as had been assumed frequently, doctrinal differences but the founding of the monasteries of Yangs pa can

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<sup>222</sup> Dreyfus (2005a: 296). According to Dreyfus (ibid. 293–297) up to the second half of the fifteenth century the differences in the scholastic curricula were not reflections of sectarian differences but merely styles of teaching.

<sup>223</sup> Apart from the connections mentioned in the first sections of the chapter, the Karmapa mentions having passed the *upāsaka* vows to the Phag gru and Bya pa lords (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* fol. 12b/p. 373). Verhufen (1995: 40) has correctly evaluated the Eighth Karmapa's position of strength due to his Rin spungs pa support, but did not remark much about his connection to the Phag mo gru pa who regained some strength after the 1520s.

<sup>224</sup> The letter is *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *Bod rgyal po chen po'i rgyal thabs kyi mdzad pa gtam du byas pa sne'u sdong rgyal po la gnang ba rin po che'i phreng ba'o* (see also above, 141, n. 164).

<sup>225</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 37b (p. 223).

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. fol. 38a (p. 224).

(1503) in north-west gTsang and Thub chen (1498) east of Lhasa.<sup>227</sup> This supports the thesis of geo-strategical issues being the cause of conflict rather than doctrinal differences.<sup>228</sup> The Karmapa's position did not go unchallenged among the dGe lugs pa only: some Sa skya monasteries in gTsang were unhappy with the Karma bKa' brgyud pa's disproportionate influence,<sup>229</sup> and some saw the Karmapa's humility as a sign of subordination.<sup>230</sup>

### 4.3 *Spiritual Programme for Teaching Meditation*

Chapter Two has shown that the Great Seal is not usually an instruction given to beginners. What, then, did the Karmapa emphasise when guiding his students on the Buddhist path? What role did the Great Seal play in his writings and teaching?

The Eighth Karmapa's spiritual memoirs and biographies suggest he stressed the 'graded path of the three kinds of individuals' (*skyes bo gsum gyi lam rim*) when instructing students in meditation.<sup>231</sup> He reports in 1534

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. fol. 37b (p. 223). It is interesting to note that Sangs rgyas dpal grub attributes the founding of Thub chen to the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa whereas other sources claim that the Seventh Karmapa founded this monastery.

<sup>228</sup> Kapstein (2006b: 130).

<sup>229</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 38b (p. 225). In his poetic travel journal *Rang gi rtogs brjod lam glu dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i dga' ston*, Tshar chen Blo gsal rgya mtsho (1502–1566), a tantric master of the Sa skya tradition, although he did not meet the Karmapa in person, heavily complains about the Eighth Karmapa's behaviour and doctrines, calling his commentaries 'impure and corrupt' (*ma gstang ba myog zhig*) refusing to pay taxes to the Karmapa's patron, the Rin spungs pa. See Cyrus Stearns, *Song of the Road: The Poetic Travel Journal of Tsarchen Losal Gyatso* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 112. This passage in full in Tibetan and English translation: ibid. 111–115 (translation); discussion on page 13 (introduction). Tshar chen's claims about the scholastic defects are not substantiated. Stearns remarks that these criticisms may also be the result of the Karmapa's accusations against the rNying ma pa (ibid. 13 and 20, n. 13). A prior critique by the Eighth Karmapa of the rNying ma, however, may be forged as discussed in the opening of *gSang sngags snga 'gyur las 'phros pa'i brgal lan rtsod pa med pa'i ston pa dang bstan pa'i byung ba brjod pa drang po'i sa bon* attributed to Mi bskyod rdo rje (see also Ringu Tulku 2006: 161). These complex relationships and their historical contexts need to be further explored in future research. The issue of the rNying ma pa polemics and possible forgeries will be discussed in my forthcoming publication about the origin and transmission of Mi bskyod rdo rje's *gsung 'bum*.

<sup>230</sup> Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 38b (p. 225).

<sup>231</sup> Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*, the earliest template for the Tibetan graded path, distinguishes three types of practitioners: those of lower and middling spiritual aspirations strive for happiness in this life (i) or their personal liberation from cyclic existence (ii), while those of the highest capacity tread the Bodhisattva path and thus belong to the Mahāyāna (iii).

that his main teacher, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa, urged him that from his eighteenth year on he should teach the sūtra approach to his disciples, and the Karmapa, according to the memoir, adhered to that advice.<sup>232</sup> When it comes to the meditation instructions (*khrid*) taught, a further spiritual memoir confirms the importance assigned to the graded path system of Atiśa: mind training (*blo shyang*) and tantric instructions such as the empowerments and explanations of Nāropa's doctrines were employed 'according to necessity'.<sup>233</sup> But he mainly (*gtso bor*) taught the graded path of the three kinds of individuals, with the aid of Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*.<sup>234</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* underlines this hypothesis.<sup>235</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa's meditation instructions corroborate the statements and are concerned with this topic either explicitly or implicitly. The Fifth Zhwa dmar pa had, for example, incorporated the *Skyes bu gsum gyi lam rim bsodus pa'i khrid* (*Instruction which Summarises the Graded Path of the Three [Kinds of] Individuals*) within the rubric of instructions where 'the dharma becomes the path', the second of the Four Dharmas of sGam po pa.<sup>236</sup> The text consists of stepwise instructions on meditation: explaining bodily posture, taking refuge, *bodhicitta*, remembering the teacher,

Graded path commentaries often conclude with a brief section on Buddhist tantra (Jackson, D. 1996: 230). A later example of this genre is Tsong kha pa's *Lam rim chen mo* (see also Wayman 1978). sGam po pa's famed graded teaching, too, though not modelled after this system, refers to the three kinds of individuals (sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen, *Dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*, p. 211).

<sup>232</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*.

<sup>233</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 4a–fol. 9b (pp. 357–367) outlines the texts which the Eighth Karmapa wrote up to his forty-fourth year and *ibid.* fol. 9b ff. (p. 367) relates how he directly expounded (*bshad*) on these texts. This point is subdivided into how he spread the monasteries (*sde*) for the saṅgha, the expository colleges (*bshad grwa*), and ordered the three bases (*rten gsum*) for enlightened body, speech, and mind.

<sup>234</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b (p. 367). For a translation of the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, see Eimer (1978) and Davidson (1995). For Atiśa's works see Sherburne (1983). The importance of this work for the genre of the graded path has been noted by Jackson, D. (1995: 230). Nowhere does the Eighth Karmapa mention sGam po pa's *Thar rgyan* (*Ornament of Liberation*). This might be precisely because it belongs—as Jackson indicates—to the graded teaching (*bstan rim*) genre, which Jackson defines as related, but slightly different, from that of the graded path (*ibid.* 229).

<sup>235</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1324–25, states that the Karmapa expounded the great treatises of sūtra and mantra, mainly using the graded path of the bKa' gdams pa, as a means for turning the students' minds toward the dharma and letting the dharma become the path, inciting renunciation and compassion.

<sup>236</sup> *dKar chag*, fol. 12a (p. 22). Among other instructions categorised under the first two dharmas of sGam po pa, there are many more who touch on related topics, such as contemplation of impermanence, compassion, and the like.

calming the mind, and finally the meditation on essencelessness (Skt. *anātman*). The Karmapa's concern for placing the Great Seal in the context of the practice of teachings is evident from certain passages in the *Phyag rgya chen po zhi gnas kyi khrid*, where—though the Great Seal is mentioned—emphasis is on graded teachings.<sup>237</sup>

Adherence to Atiśa's system is not unusual, given its introduction into the lineage through sGam po pa and widespread popularity in the whole of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>238</sup> The Eighth Karmapa's explicit usage of Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*, however, is worth noting: nowhere does he talk of the standard graded teaching attributed to sGam po pa, the *Thar rgyan*. This expression of reverence for the old bKa' gdams pa masters is in line with the favour with which he speaks of them in his Madhyamaka commentary.<sup>239</sup> One spiritual memoir notes that tantric instructions, including the one intention of the 'Bri gung bKa' bgyud pa, lineage holders on pure appearances, renunciation, devotion, and enlightened attitude were taught as a 'background' (*rgyab*) for the graded path teachings.<sup>240</sup>

Genuine exposition of the Buddhist tantras was apparently restricted to small groups of students. According to a spiritual memoir, the Eighth Karmapa's teacher Sangs rgyas mnyan pa ordered him to teach only a little of the graded tantra path (*gsang sngags lam gyi rim pa*) from his twenty-seventh year onwards.<sup>241</sup> Consequently, the Karmapa taught it to some restricted individuals, while remaining sceptical of the more 'public' empowerments.<sup>242</sup> dPa' bo Rin po che supports this claim, saying that to

<sup>237</sup> See, for example, the passage quoted in Chapter Five (5.1): Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po zhi gnas kyi khrid*, fol. 4a (p. 175) and Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kam tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 1b (p. 958). Starting with basic capacity he defines contemplation of death and impermanence as essential, for without these ones would cheat oneself with the mere semblance of dharma. He then goes on to describe cause and effect.

<sup>238</sup> See Sherpa (2004: 17–94 and esp. 91–94) for sGam po pa's life and an introduction of bKa' gdams pa teachings.

<sup>239</sup> See Williams (1983a: 129), for the Karmapa's approval of the bKa' gdams as found in his *Dwags*; he does not take issue with those masters but rather with Tsong kha pa's interpretation of them; see Brunnhözl (2004: 553–97), for the differences between the Eighth Karmapa's and Tsong kha pa's interpretations of Madhyamaka.

<sup>240</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b (p. 367).

<sup>241</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nam thar*, fol. 6af (p. 340f).

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 6b (p. 341); the statement is translated in the introduction to this chapter. One needs to take into account that this source stems from the year 1534, meaning the twenty-seventh year of the Eighth Karmapa, marking the start of his tantric teaching, had just begun.

worthy students the Karmapa taught the extraordinary Vajrayāna-instructions, stages, and visualisations.<sup>243</sup> That stated, it seems the Karmapa imparted instructions resembling the Great Seal or tantric meditations before the age of twenty-seven (though these do not necessarily fit with the idea of exposition of the tantras).<sup>244</sup> And despite the claim of restricted exposition of the tantras, most of the Eighth Karmapa's meditation instructions found in his writings are devoted to instruction on tantric completion stage practices and the subtle energy systems.<sup>245</sup>

What do the Karmapa's spiritual memoirs say about his teaching of the Great Seal proper? When enumerating the Great Seal instructions (*phyag chen gyi khrid*) he imparted, the Eighth Karmapa begins with those bKa' brgyud pa transmissions that he had formerly practised: Karma, 'Brug pa, 'Ba rom pa, 'Bri gung, mTshal pa, sMar pa, and Khro phu. He then claims that he particularly emphasised the meditation instructions on the bKa' brgyud traditions, such as the one of Jo bo Mitrayogin and the Great Seal of the *dohās* which was transmitted in India by Vajrapāṇi.<sup>246</sup>

<sup>243</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1324 ff. Here, the number of disciples who received true tantric instructions is depicted as more numerous than in the spiritual memoir, likely caused by either its later composition or the usual element of idealisation encountered in such accounts.

<sup>244</sup> For example, the dialogues analysed in Chapter Five (5.2.1–5.3.1). mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, March 2007) explained that 'exposition of the secret mantra' (*gsang sngags mchad nyan*) would not refer to meditation instructions (*khrid*), question and answer texts (*dris lan*) or simple empowerments (*dbang*). In his view, the term denotes only extensive explanations on the tantras. The Great Seal of the Innate Union (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor*) would also not belong to this category, as it blends both sūtra and tantra. The Eighth Karmapa's spiritual memoir *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 10a (p. 368), lists tantric explanations (*bshad pa*) on the creation and completion stages, such as the Five stages of Cakrasaṃvara and Guhyasamāja and the six yogas of Kālacakra, including an oral transmission of sGam po pa (*sgam po snyan rgyud*) and the secret teachings of Lama Zhang (*zhang bka' rgya ma*). Most important empowerments such as the Kālacakra, the various traditions of Cakrasaṃvara, and the ocean of *ḍākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro rgya mtsho*) are also listed.

<sup>245</sup> The major part (both in terms of titles and pages) of volumes twenty to twenty-five, among the section of instructions (*khrid dang man ngag*), deal with instructions such as the secret teachings of Lama Zhang (*zhang bka' rgya ma*) and the Great Seal in its tantric context. Alone, volumes twenty-one and twenty-two are dedicated to the *sKu gsum ngo sprod*, and twenty-three makes up the *rLung sems gnyis med* (*Differentiating Energy-Wind and Mind*) (see also Chapter Three (3.3)). Though the extent to which a certain kind of instruction is accounted for may not inform how often a meditation was actually taught, it still has some value.

<sup>246</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b (p. 367). After the previously mentioned sūtric, tantric, and Great Seal instructions the text continues adding the vows, the recitation of Avalokiteśvara, and various reading transmissions (*lung*) of the sūtra treatises. According



The written works do not fully reflect this claim. For example, the shorter instructions in volume nineteen bear testimony to the numerous Great Seal transmissions listed by the Karmapa: approaches range from the 'Brug pa Great Seal of rGyal ba yang dgon pa (1213–1258), the Great Seal of 'O rgyan pa called 'the six cycles of equal taste' (*ro snyoms skor drug*), the fivefold Great Seal of the 'Bri gung pa and, naturally, the Great Seal of the Karma bKa' brgyud pa.<sup>247</sup> But only one instruction mentions Mitra-yogin<sup>248</sup> and there is no formal instruction or commentary on Saraha's *dohā*.<sup>249</sup>

There are some likely interpretations of the passage above from the Eighth Karmapa's spiritual memoir. Noting that he emphasised the approach of the *dohā* may well refer to teaching a direct approach to the realisation of mind, the essence of the Great Seal. One finds Saraha abundantly quoted, and the importance of both Maitrīpa and Saraha is also

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to 'Gos Lo tsā ba, Vajrapāṇi (born 1017) was key for transmitting the Great Seal in Tibet in what he calls the upper translation (*stod 'gyur*) of the intermediate period (Roerich 1996: 860) and played a major part in bringing Saraha's *Treasury of Doha Verses* (*Dohā mdzod kyi glu*) to Tibet (Roerich 1996: 839–866; Schaeffer 2000: 125–127; Karma 'phrin las pa I, Phyogs las mnam rgyal, *Do ha skor gsum gyi ṭika 'bring po*, p. 11–12). One of Vajrapāṇi's most important sources of transmission was Bal po Asu, alias Skye med bde chen (see Schaeffer 2000: 123–131, for a more detailed account; and also Karma 'phrin las pa's *Do hā skor gsum gyi ṭika 'bring po*, which is a major historical source).

<sup>247</sup> For the Great Seal of Yang dgon pa, see *rGyal ba yang dgon pa'i ngo sprod bdun ma'i khrid yig*; instructions on the fivefold Great Seal of the 'Bri gung are *lNga ldan tshogs su bsgom pa'i cho ga* and *Phyag rgya chen po lnga ldan gyi khrid*; works teaching the Great Seal of the siddha 'O rgyan pa are *rJe rgod tshang ba'i ro snyoms sgang dril* and *Mos gus phyag chen gyi khrid zab mo rgyal ba rgod tshang pa'i lugs* (all texts by Karmapa VIII, Mi bskyod rdo rje). Instructions about the Great Seal of sGam po pa are *sGam po'i lugs kyi phyag rgya chen po* and *sGam po pa'i lhan cig skyes sbyor bskyang thabs shin tu zab mo*.

<sup>248</sup> Among the meditation instructions it is the Eighth Karmapa's *sNying po don gsum gyi don khrid*, a guided meditation on Avalokiteśvara, which contains a reference to this master. It describes how to accumulate mantras and purify veils (*gsags sbyong*), e.g. how to practice the two stages of tantric meditation. This is followed by instructions on the view and meditation. The Karmapa was urged by some students to write this instruction and did so—showing the skill of sGam po pa. On fol. 3a (p. 538) Mitrayogin is mentioned and on fol. 9a (p. 550) his theory is quoted when the perception of emptiness in meditation and post-meditation is discussed. Mitrayogin was connected to the transmission of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet and his Great Seal was called 'cutting the stream of *samsāra*' (*'khor ba rgyun chod*). See Roerich (1996:1030–43, Book XIV 'The Cycle of Mahākaruṇika and that of the Vajrāvali'), for an account of Mitrayogin. Van der Kuijp (1994: fn. 14) has listed a further five Tibetan sources on his life found in the Tibetan Library in Beijing. Mitrayogin was a contemporary of the thirteenth-century Indian Paṇḍit Śākyaśrībhadra and teacher of Khro pu Lo tsā ba Byams pa dpal (1172–1236).

<sup>249</sup> See the second case study in Chapter Five.

clearly acknowledged in his *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.<sup>250</sup> And both claims may refer to orally-imparted instructions; the value attached to oral pith instructions, and the significant role of the teacher transmitting such instructions being a significant issue in the transmission of meditative practices within Tibetan religious traditions.

It is evident that, despite the normative appeal of secrecy and orality, a bulk of these so-called 'oral' instructions was put into writing.<sup>251</sup> Still, many written practices are designed to be commented on by a teacher. Despite the Eighth Karmapa's call for assembling and taking care of his work,<sup>252</sup> and the huge amount of texts collected, the texts cannot document every instance of teaching. Thus, the Eighth Karmapa's statement in the spiritual memoir can still make a valid point for understanding his emphasis in transmitting the Great Seal.<sup>253</sup>

This chapter has introduced the Eighth Karmapa's life outlining the main formative events of the Eighth Karmapa's religious career, his scholastic contributions and his political relations. It was shown, how his life was pervaded by training and teaching the Great Seal, and how he became one of the greatest scholars in his tradition. Despite involvement in the politics of the day with both the Rin spungs pa and the Phag mo gru pa, along with local lords such as the sKu rab pa and Yar klung nobles, his sceptical attitude towards the religio-political atmosphere of his time became evident.

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<sup>250</sup> See for example in the second case study in Chapter Five and its notes. In the *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6a (p. 11), the Eighth Karmapa also approves of the system of alikakāra-cittamātra-Madhyamaka taught by the Indian Vajrapāṇi as an approach to the Great Seal (see Chapter Six); see also Ruegg (1988: 1248ff.); Brunnhölzl (2004: 52); Sherpa (2004: 172).

<sup>251</sup> The *lam 'bras* instructions central to the Sa skya pa tantric practices, and the vajra verses (*rdo rje tshig rkang*) containing them, were put into writing despite claims that they should not be. During the period of the second Ngor abbot Mus pa chen po dKon mchog rgyal mtshan (1388–1469, Jackson, D. 1989b: 52 supposes he held the abbot position 1456–61), who was held in high esteem by all Sa skya pas, the term *lam 'bras slob bshad*, 'explanations for disciples', appeared for the first time. It involves especially secret instructions which had already existed but were only intended for selected students. The more accessible elucidations were named *tshogs bshad*, 'explanations for the gathering' (Stearns 2001: 39–45, see *ibid.* also for a discussion regarding details of the *slob bshad* and *tshogs bshad*).

<sup>252</sup> *Kam tshang*, p. 352.

<sup>253</sup> See Graham (1987: 67–79) for the scripture as spoken word, which he calls the 'Indian Paradigm' and which is reflected in the Tibetan concept of 'transmission through reading' (*lung*). Klein and Wangyal (2006: 11–13) have illustrated with a Bon po text the importance of seeing the context of meditation and education for examining instructions.

The path for the three kinds of individuals was a central topic of the Karmapa's spiritual programme for teaching meditation, reflecting a general 'mainstream monastic outline'.<sup>254</sup> The tantric teachings were apparently passed only to a few worthy students, despite the fact that the main portion of the Karmapa's instructions is devoted to such topics.

It then showed the breadth of his Great Seal instructions and suggested on the basis of spiritual memoirs, that the Eighth Karmapa placed emphasis on the teachings of Saraha's *dohā*, transmitted in India by Vajrapāṇi, and on the Great Seal of Mitrayogin.

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<sup>254</sup> Davidson (1995: 293).



## Chapter 5

### Case Studies of the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal

[I] do not keep even the refuge-vows and do not meditate on death and impermanence for a single session. [But, I] say: '[I] meditate on the Great Seal right away!' [Lama], please consider me fool with compassion!<sup>1</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa

The previous chapter has documented how the Eighth Karmapa studied and practised the Great Seal; and analysed its place in his over-all programme of teaching meditation. How then did this prolific scholar and meditation master teach the Great Seal directly to specific students? Some of the related questions one might raise are: how do the contexts of genre and addressee influence the teaching of Great Seal meditation practice? Do the instructions contain any fixed doctrine? How does the Great Seal fit into the historical and doctrinal contexts of the Eighth Karmapa's life and works?

To examine how the Eighth Karmapa taught the Great Seal to specific students, some so-called 'instruction texts' are analysed in three in-depth case studies.<sup>2</sup> To that end, it discusses the genres in question, selects specific sources, and suggests a scheme of analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the concluding verse of the Eighth Karmapa's *Instruction on the Great Seal [and] Calm Abiding (śamatha) Meditation*; Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po zhi gnas kyi khrid*, fol. 4a (p. 175): *skyabs 'gro tsam gyi bslab bya mi bsrung zhing/ 'chi ba mi rtag thun gcig mi bsgom par/ da lta nyid du phyag chen bsgoms zhes pa/ /blun po'i rang bzhin bdag la thugs rjes gzigs/*.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the value these genres have for the study of the Great Seal, the idea to select what one may call 'marginal texts' (in that they are not used frequently by the tradition nowadays) was partly inspired by ideas of New Historicism (see Schmitz 2002: 175–92, for a description of New Historicism as applied to classical Greek texts). The discussion of Tibetan instruction texts, or so-called 'orally determined genres' was recently taken up by Dan Martin in 'The book-moving incident of 1209', in *Edition, éditions: l'écrit au Tibet, évolution et devenir*, ed. A. Chayet, C. Scherrer-Schaub, F. Robin, and J.-L. Achard (München: Indus Verlag, 2010), 197–217 and Marta Sernesi, 'The Collected Sayings of the

### 5.1 Case Studies: Concrete Examples of Teaching the Great Seal

The criteria for selecting some of the Eighth Karmapa's texts for the case studies are based on content (the Great Seal or teachings which can be grouped as 'spontaneous Buddhism'),<sup>3</sup> religious function (instruction on view or meditation), form (shorter and concise texts from respective genre), and intended audience, e.g. the addressee in the given teaching situation (a specific group or one student).

The religious function can apply to various genres: spiritual instructions (*gdams ngag*), esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), questions and answers (*dris lan*), meditation instructions (*khrid*), pieces of advice (*bslab bya*), spiritual songs (*mgur*), letters (*'phring yig*), epistles (*chab shog*), and sometimes evocation rituals (*sgrub thabs*). Religious function could also refer to clearly defined passages in other texts, for example songs (*mgur*), questions and answers (*dris lan*), or passages directly teaching meditation and embedded in a spiritual biography (*rnam thar*).<sup>4</sup> Here, those texts teaching meditation of the Great Seal are examined, which address a particular person or group of persons and, more precisely, a person who has a specific question (or wish) about Great Seal view and practice. The orientation is thus the intended audience of the teaching.<sup>5</sup>

The case studies investigate works from three genres, which have been discussed previously: dialogues in a spiritual biography, question and answer texts, and meditation instructions related genres (*khrid*, *man ngag*, *bslab bya*). The main rubrics and questions for the examination are: (i) the

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master: oral and written transmissions and the authority of tradition,' *JIABS* 36–37/1–2 (2013, 2014, 2015), 459–489.

<sup>3</sup> Beyer (1975: 148).

<sup>4</sup> One may argue that other texts, such as the larger commentaries or scholastic treatises, teach the Great Seal and its practice. Their general outlook and style, however, is different. It is assumed that they are not intended to be a direct meditation instruction. Nevertheless, often the larger treatises such as the Madhyamaka commentary are vital for communicating the view (*lta ba*), often considered the necessary background for effective meditation (*sgom pa*). Many Buddhist traditions argue that view and meditation (*sgom pa*) cannot be separated (Bielefeldt 2005: 236–240).

<sup>5</sup> This excludes, for example, the meditation manuals (*khrid yig*) written for larger audiences such as sGam po pa bKra shis nman rgyal's *Phyag chen zla ba'i 'od zer* and also the manuals of the Ninth Karmapa (dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX, *Lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi zab khrid nges don rgya mtsho'i snying po phrin las 'od 'phro*, *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid yig spyi som rtso tshig* and *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid zin bris*). These are more systematic approaches likely designed for instructing a larger group of students (see Sobisch 2003a:12); a closer academic study of these works is a desideratum.

historical context: what is its place in the life of the Eighth Karmapa and the events in Tibet? Where did the teaching take place and what can be learned about the addressee? (ii) The doctrinal content and context, namely how the contents relate to the Eighth Karmapa's and further Great Seal instructions and doctrines. Collating these analytical angles, the relation and adaptation of instruction, and addressee are discussed.

## 5.2 *Dialogues in A khu a khra's Spiritual Biography*<sup>6</sup>

In the spiritual biographies of the Eighth Karmapa, dialogues are scarce.<sup>7</sup> The two sources containing dialogues are the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* and *A khu A khra*. The passages in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* describe certain answers and questions rather than actually quoting a full dialogue.<sup>8</sup> In comparison, the dialogues embedded in *A khu A khra* are clearly quoted as being such a dialogue. Furthermore, most of these advices are centred on the Great Seal (not in sense of the term but clearly in sense of the 'essence teaching' imparted). They represent first textual witnesses that claim to contain a teaching of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>9</sup>

### 5.2.1 *Their Function in the Main Narrative*

The dialogues should not, strictly speaking, be regarded as a question and answer text (*dris lan*). Although a student requests instruction on meditation and the text portrays the Eighth Karmapa to respond, they consist of a two-way communication between the Karmapa and a student about Buddhist teaching. Furthermore, the dialogues do not necessarily express a written exchange but were allegedly orally conducted before being noted down at

<sup>6</sup> For a slightly expanded and methodologically developed discussion of these dialogues from the point of view of narratology, see Jim Rheingans, 'Narratology in Buddhist Studies: Dialogues about Meditation in a Tibetan Hagiography', in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Jim Rheingans (Berlin: EBV, 2014), 69–112.

<sup>7</sup> To survey a larger number of spiritual biographies in search of questions and answers passages exceeds the scope of this research. Its focus remains the Eighth Karmapa.

<sup>8</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1240, documents the Eighth Karmapa's answers to an issue about self awareness (*rang rig*).

<sup>9</sup> Apart from the four dialogues there are occasional acts of speech and one further, very brief, dialogue concerning the topic of the Great Seal marginally; *A khu A khra*, fol. 32b–fol. 33a (p. 96–97).

some later point.<sup>10</sup> From the historical point of view, then, indications about the origin and production of the passages have to be researched. In order not to confuse dialogues with question and answer texts, they are called 'dialogues' here.

Dialogues further differ from question and answer texts in that they can be understood as embedded non-narrative texts in the main narrative about the Eighth Karmapa's liberation.<sup>11</sup> Taking these differences into account, some tools offered by narratology are employed to aid in understanding the textual context in addition to examining historical and doctrinal content. The categories employed are a simplified and adapted version of Genette-Bal, as explained by Schmitz and already applied by Scherer.<sup>12</sup>

Distinguishing between real author (the historical figure), implied author, and narrator, the narrator is the one narrating the elements in the text. De Jong, who has used the system of Genette-Bal for an examination of Greek classics, has distilled the subject to three main points: who is talking (the narrator) from which perspective (focus); who perceives.<sup>13</sup> In general in *A khu A khra*, the narrator of the main narrative, is heterodiegetic in that he recounts from outside the world of the narrative. The main narrative is extradiegetic in that it talks to the reader of the spiritual biography.<sup>14</sup>

For the dialogues analysed here, it is important to ask: at which point are they introduced, how do they fit into the overall plot? What could be their function within the text and plot? The standard story (consisting of all events to be depicted) of a spiritual biography about enlightened individuals

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<sup>10</sup> According to mKhan po Nges don, this recording is relatively rare and makes these dialogues unique (oral communication, December 2006). So far, no academic study has verified this claim and a detailed survey would go beyond the scope of this thesis. But when compared to the question and answer texts by Karma 'phrin las pa and by the Eighth Karmapa, their majority is indeed written.

<sup>11</sup> Bal (1997: 60). It can be debated whether the intended audience of the spiritual biography and, for example, a meditation instruction or question and answer text are the same (though Willis 1995: 5 has argued that a spiritual biography can be used as a tantric instruction or preparation for it). But the embedded dialogues definitely have an intended audience similar to that of meditation instructions, namely an individual in need of spiritual instruction.

<sup>12</sup> Schmitz (2002: 68–75); Scherer (2006c: 2–4); see also Bal (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Schmitz (2002: 73); Scherer (2006c: 3); for a discussion of focalisation, see also Bal (1981: 205–207).

<sup>14</sup> See Schmitz (2002: 72), who has used these categories of Genette-Bal with the example of classical Greek narratives. In the colophon to his own work, *A khu A khra* stresses that he has noted the marvellous events as he had witnessed them (*A khu A khra*, fol. 36b–37a/p. 104–105). With this introduction of the narrator, one may also argue that the whole narrative is recounted from a homodiegetic perspective.



is arranged in certain plots (delineating the causation of events) and expresses itself in the actual narrative text. The narrative text then works by either showing (by means of metaphor, images, etc.) or telling (directly relating its message).<sup>15</sup>

Listing the simplified topoi of the story of an incarnate Lama as exemplified by *A khu A khra*, one may distinguish: (1) pre-existences as enlightened student of the Buddha and as Buddhist masters in India and in Tibet, (2) birth accompanied by miraculous signs, (3) exhibition of special abilities, (4) recognition as rebirth of previous incarnation, (5) enthronement, (6) education with the spiritual mentor (study, reflection, and meditation), and (7) enlightened deeds.<sup>16</sup>

The four dialogues are placed in the year 1513, after a major element of the plot in the story of an incarnate Lama, the enthronement (5). The enthronement had been preceded by an account of the Karmapa's abilities as a young boy and a long dispute over his status as reincarnation. Between the enthronement and the dialogues, the narrative is replete with visions that establish the Eighth Karmapa's continued connection with the transmission lineage:<sup>17</sup> various Buddha aspects such as Mahākāla and Hayagrīva<sup>18</sup> along with important masters of the bKa' brgyud lineage such as Mi la ras pa, sGam po pa, and Karma Pakši.<sup>19</sup>

The Karmapa composed an eulogy to Mahākāla, the first written work recorded, and further convinces the inhabitants of the encampment of his authenticity, before receiving vows and tantric transmissions from the rGyal tshab Rin po che. Further visions are recounted of his predecessor, the Seventh Karmapa (along with stories from his former life) and of siddhas such as Saraha, Virupa, Padmasambhava, Marpa, and Mi la ras pa.<sup>20</sup> When the Karmapa went to Chos rdzong bKra shis Gling, blessed rice

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<sup>15</sup> Plots are those causal elements which are indispensable for the development of the actions. Ricouer, for example, considered the so called 'emplotment' as indispensable for both fictional and historical narrative in that 'the reader is guided by anticipation, focus, and retrospection' (Cobley 2001: 19).

<sup>16</sup> The elements of passing away accompanied by signs of realisation is naturally not included in *A khu A khra*, as the story is told only up to the year 1514 (*A khu A khra*, fol. 36b/p. 104: see also Chapter Three (3.4)).

<sup>17</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 22a (p. 75); see also Chapter Four (4.1.3).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. fol. 22b (p. 76).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. fol. 23a (p. 77).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. fol. 23b (p. 78)–fol. 25a (p. 81).

(usually thrown towards the objects) stuck to several consecrated statues and implements of the Seventh and Sixth Karmapa.<sup>21</sup>

With regard to the plot depicted above, the narrative after the enthronement evolves around the topoi of education (6), enlightened deeds, and show of special spiritual abilities (7), occurring in a mixed way. The narrative function of the sentences within these two topoi preceding and surrounding the dialogues may be analysed as: (i) confirmation of status as Karmapa's incarnation (through convincing those in the encampment and retelling stories from previous lives), (ii) continuity within the transmission and spiritual insights (through visions of the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage masters), (iii) formal exercise of his powers (appointing abbots, see below), and (iv) exhibition of capacities as a realised teacher (through teaching the Great Seal in the dialogues). Showing these abilities as teacher is a likely function of the embedded dialogues in the overall structure of this narrative.<sup>22</sup>

### 5.2.2 Dialogue with *A khu a khra*

The first (and also second) dialogue are placed by the source as taking place between the fourth lunar month of 1513 and the third day of the eighth lunar month of the same year.<sup>23</sup> The first dialogue's counterpart of the Karmapa is the author of the spiritual biography himself, *A khu a khra*, alias Byang chub bzang po. The geographical region in which the narrative sets the dialogues is the monastery of sDe steng, somewhere in the areas Lho rong or Khams.<sup>24</sup>

A<sup>25</sup> tea invitation of rGya ston Nang po Kun dga' rgyal mtshan and relatives

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. fol. 26a (p. 83). This image occurs in various places in the Eighth Karmapa's spiritual biographies and also in Karma 'phrin las pa's spiritual biography (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1162; translation in Rheingans 2004: 113).

<sup>22</sup> The form chosen to present the dialogues is translation (along with Tibetan text) and commentary, followed by a more detailed analysis. Such a close philological examination is necessary in order to connect the thesis to the textual sources and give an impression of the texts.

<sup>23</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 22a (p. 75); Sang rgyas dpal grub, fol. 12a (p. 172). In the fourth lunar month of 1513 the Karmapa had received the *upavāsaka* vows and empowerments from rGyal tshab Rin po che.

<sup>24</sup> The monastery of sDe stengs itself could not yet be identified, however, the region is clear from the areas the Karmapa had visited prior and after the dialogues (*A khu A khra*, fol. 31b/p. 94); see also Chapter Four (4.1.2, 4.1.3).

<sup>25</sup> I would like to acknowledge the support of the Khams-born mKhan po Karma Nges don for better understanding certain idiomatic passages of the text. Given the acquaintance he has with colloquialisms from Khams and the fact that many of them have not changed from the

(*khu dbon*) came (*slebs*).<sup>26</sup> [Karmapa] was [then] invited to bDe stengs [monastery, and the local saṅgha] made vast offerings (*'bul zhabs*). [Karmapa] granted dBon po Nam mkha' the position (*bsko bzhang*) of the head of the monastery (*gdan sa*), [along with] a [horse] saddle (*sga*), bags (*shubs*), and a red rug (*gdan*).<sup>27</sup> When staying there, one night [the Eighth Karmapa] went to his [own] bedroom<sup>28</sup> and said to A khu a khra:

'Conceptualisation is the *dharmakāya*, appearances are mind, appearances and mind are inseparable.'<sup>29</sup>

First the Karmapa is being invited and honoured. Then the setting moves from official to private, namely to the bedroom of the Karmapa. Implicitly the attendant is also placed in this space. Since it can be assumed that the bedroom of the Karmapa was considered accessible only to those closest to him, the attendant in the chamber of the Karmapa invokes an image of closeness.

Before the dialogue the narrator has in general narrated from a heterodiegetic (from outside the narrative) and from extradiegetic perspective (to an audience outside the narrative). He continues doing so when opening the dialogues: 'and said to A khu a khra ....' At the outset of the embedded dialogue new narrators are introduced, recounting homodiegetically and to an intradiegetic audience, namely to the attendant A khu a khra. For the first time the character of A khu a khra is introduced in the narrative. Remarkably, it is the Karmapa who begins the dialogue with a statement.

Doctrinally, this statement expresses the very core of sGam po pa's Great Seal teachings in equating Buddhist terms that are, in more conventional analysis, considered opposite; namely, conceptualisation (Tib. *rnam rtog*, Skt. *vikalpa*) and the truth body of a Buddha, the *dharmakāya*. Here, however, instead of using the frequently employed phrase 'essence

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sixteenth century until today, his information on these linguistic intricacies was very valuable.

<sup>26</sup> A more unlikely version (because *slebs* is not honorific) would be: '[Karmapa] arrived [upon] the invitation for tea of rGya ston Nang po Kun dga' rgyal mtshan and relatives (*khu dbon*).'

<sup>27</sup> Or 'cushion'. Here, this could mean that he put him on a throne and thereby granted him this position as a performative act. Alternatively, these implements simply belong to the position.

<sup>28</sup> *gZims mal*. Goldstein (2001): honorific of *nyal sa* – bedroom.

<sup>29</sup> A *khu A khra*, fol. 26 a (p. 83): *yang rgya ston nang po kun dga' rgyal mtshan khu dbon gyi ja 'dren slebs/ bde stengs su gdan drangs/ 'bul zhabs rgya chen po byas/ dbon po nam mkha' la gdan sa'i bsko bzhang sga shubs gdan dmar gnang/ der bzhugs dus nub gcig gzims mal du phebs nas a khu a khra la/ rnam rtog chos sku yin/ snang ba sems yin/ snang sems dbyer med yin gsungs*.

(*ngo bo*) of conceptualisation is the *dharmakāya* (*rnam rtog gi ngo bo chos sku*), the text just uses the plain 'conceptualisation is *dharmakāya*.'<sup>30</sup>

The idea that appearances are (projections of) mind is a rather well known Mahāyāna teaching from the Indian Yogācāra, often named 'merely mind' (*cittamātra*).<sup>31</sup> In a question and answer text presumably composed later, the Eighth Karmapa stresses that these two points stem from different levels of doctrine. The Karmapa was asked whether objecting to conceptualisation as being the *dharmakāya*, and to the assertion that appearances are mind would mean to denigrate the Karma bKa' brgyud. He replied that not maintaining that appearances are mind would damage the Yogācāra, he had not heard of anyone asserting that it would refer to the bKa' brgyud pa.<sup>32</sup> In this dialogue, however, the Karmapa seems to use both to incite the exchange which continues:

A khu a khra said: 'Yes (lags),<sup>33</sup> thoughts are delusion, but appearances and mind are different. For example, this butter lamp has the ability to burn and illuminate, however, in the very moment [it] is impermanent; in the same way (ltar) all conditioned phenomena are impermanent. The *dharmakāya* has neither [the characteristic of] permanence nor impermanence.'<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Conceptualisation and conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* is a key topic of sGam po pa's *rNam rtog don dam gyi sngos sprod* (critically edited and translated by Sherpa 2004: 188–293); see also the famed statement in dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i phreng ba*, p. 117: *rnam rtog ngo chos skur gsungs pa*. For a further discussion of the conceptualisation/*dharmakāya* instructions of the Eighth Karmapa, see Chapter Six (6.2). The Great Seal use of *rnam rtog* is translated here as 'conceptualisation'. Its Apabhraṃśa parallel is *v/biappa*, Skt. *vikalpa* (Kværne 1977: Saraha, Caryāgiti 19, 20). Willis (1979: 34) uses 'discursive thought' in the context of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. *Dharmakāya* became synonym for Buddhature in Ratnagotravibhāga I.27 (Zimmermann 2002: 54 has described the move from *buddhajñāna* as stated in the *Tathāgatarbhasūtra*). Here it may be used in similar terms as in sGam po pa's *Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs*, pp. 527f., indicating luminosity of mind. But mostly, this dialogue with A khu a khra is rather an informal exchange.

<sup>31</sup> The most important thinkers of the Indian Yogācāra were Maitreya, Asaṅga (310–390), and Vasubandhu (fourth century) (for Indian Yogācāra, see, for example, Schmithausen 1973a, 1976, 1987, 1998; Anacker 1984; Tola and Dragonetti 2004; Kramer 2005). Its treatises, such as the *Abhisamayakālaṃkāra* or *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, widespread in Tibet, lead to manifold and conflicting interpretations (Mathes 1996: 155–252 discusses Tibetan commentaries of the *Dharmadharmaṭāvibhāga*; see Kapstein 1997, Kapstein 2000: 116–119, and Brunnhölzl 2004: 445–527, for the debates around the Yogācāra and *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka; see also Mathes 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGya ston bya bral ba'i dris lan*, fol. 6a (p. 281).

<sup>33</sup> Note the usage of the polite 'yes' (*lags*) which here rather expresses 'no'.

<sup>34</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 26 a (p. 83): *a khu a khras/ lags rnam rtog 'khrul pa yin snang sems tha dad yin/ dper na mar me 'di 'bar ba dang gsal ba'i nus pa yod kyang/ skad cig nyid la mi rtag pa ltar 'dus byas thams cad mi rtag pa yin/ chos sku la rtag pa dang mi rtag pa gang*

So A khu a khra rejects this equation. The objection the narrator A khu a khra uses is a concept also found in the Buddhist metaphysics of the *Abhidharmakośa*, which Tibetan scholars often perceived as generally representing Southern Buddhism<sup>35</sup>; that thoughts are delusion and appearances and mind are defined differently. He illustrates this with the distinction of conditioned phenomena (Skt. *saṃskṛta*) as impermanent, non-conditioned phenomena as permanent, and the *dharmakāya* beyond it.<sup>36</sup>

It is to be assumed that A khu a khra's objection does not express true disagreement or incredulity but rather an invitation to discussion; as A khu a khra must have been well acquainted with the meditative Great Seal teachings of the bKa' brgyud pa, his disagreement can be regarded a rhetorical one.<sup>37</sup>

[Karmapa] replied: 'People [like you] saying "thoughts are not the *dharmakāya* and appearances are not mind" get dust in your mouth!<sup>38</sup> You, who eat the food of the Dwags po bKa' brgyud, are a shame and disgrace.'<sup>39</sup>

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*yang med zhus pas/*. It is justified to, in the last passage, add the word 'characteristic' for describing the *dharmakāya*, or else translate it as 'there is in the *dharmakāya* neither permanence nor impermanence.'

<sup>35</sup> See Griffith (1999: 56), for the importance of the *Abhidharmakośa* to the development of the Indian Vaibhāṣika/Sarvāstivāda systems of meditation and their dualism of mind and matter. The *Abhidharmakośa* (and the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivāda for monastic discipline) were often perceived in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions as representative of their kind, despite the much vaster array of textual traditions and interpretations in India (cf. Scherer 2005: 85; Cox 2004a). A khu a khra had most likely learned the Tibetan and artificial system of *grub mtha'* (Skt. *siddhānta*), where for example the eighteen Vaibhāṣikas subsects are perceived only through the interpretations of the *Abhidharmakośa* (Hopkins 1996: 175).

<sup>36</sup> Cox (2004: 5) explains the *abhidharmic* distinctions *saṃskṛta* and *asaṃskṛta*, the *saṃskṛta* phenomena subject to arising and passing away. Schmithausen (1987: vol. I, 201) briefly explains with the aid of Yogācāra material that momentary phenomena are illusory, 'in the sense that all external phenomena, being (at least co-)conditioned by subjective concepts (*vikalpa*), are ultimately illusory'. Conditioned phenomena are often defined in the Pramāṇa traditions as those, which can perform a function in the sense of the *svalakṣaṇa* (Tillemans 1999: 210–13).

<sup>37</sup> It has been pointed out that he compiled manuals of the 'oral transmission of Ras chung pa' the *Ras chung snyan brgyud*, which is a lineage and teaching centred around esoteric tantric precepts and Great Seal instructions (Smith 2001: 64; see Sernesi 2004, for an account of the early transmission of this lineage; see Rheingans 2004: 61–63, for the relation of the Karmapa's teacher Karma 'phrin las pa to his masters; see also Chapter Three (3.4)).

<sup>38</sup> According to the linguistic information by mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, January 2007), the metaphor of *kha la thal ba* denotes: *mang po bshad mkhan yin na yang bden pa ha go ma song* = 'someone who talks much but does not understand the truth', *gang byung mang byung bshad na yang don dag ha ma go ba* = 'to talk all kind of stuff but not understanding the meaning'. He says it is not much used these days.

<sup>39</sup> *Ngo tsa yi mug* was here understood as *ngo tsa dang yi mug*.

From the Drung [A khu]: '[this] is the advice<sup>40</sup> of the powerful ones [such as a great lama].<sup>41</sup> Through conceptualisation [one] is propelled in Cyclic Existence. Appearance existing as stony mountains, solid and coarse, and formless mind to be one is pointless (*don med*).'<sup>42</sup>

The wording of the Karmapa's response may sound surprisingly strong. But the use of straightforward language in communicating with a student can, the more so in traditions of guru-devotion, express the strong bond between guru and disciple.<sup>43</sup> It seems admissible to interpret this directness as (i) being an expression of the Karmapa's youth and humour, and (ii) again emphasising the close relationship to his attendant. A khu a khra in turn has continued to oppose the Karmapa, who responds with an argument.<sup>44</sup>

'If appearances are not mind, it follows that all the different phenomena are not of one taste (*ro gcig*), because thoughts (*rnam rtog*) are not the *dharmakāya*. Further, a *dharmakāya* which is something different from the thoughts; bring it [to me], show it [to me]!'

[The Karmapa] had many such discussions about the dharma.<sup>45</sup>

The logic used here appears somewhat incoherent as the wrong consequence, namely that all phenomena are not of 'one taste' (*ro gcig*) already

<sup>40</sup> *Zhal ta* according to mKhan po Nges don honorific for *skad cha /bslab bya*. Goldstein (2001): hon. of *kha ta* = 1. advice, counsel; example: *mo la kha ta ga tshod byas nas yang ma byung nyan*.

<sup>41</sup> This was inferred after a discussion with mKhan po Nges don. In fact, *dbang yod* could also be interpreted as someone who is empowered in the Vajrayāna.

<sup>42</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 25a (p. 83): *rnam rtog chos sku min zer* [fol. 26b/p. 84] *ba dang snang ba sems min zer ba'i mi khyod kyi kha la thal ba thob/ khyod dwags po bka'* brgyud kyi lto za ba ngo tsa yi mug gsung/ drung nas dbang yod kyi zhal ta yin/ rnam rtog gis 'khor bar 'phen/ snang ba pha ri'i brag sra mkhregs can du 'dug pa dang sems gzugs med gcig don med zhus pas/.

<sup>43</sup> Especially in the Vajrayāna and among the legends of the early bKa' brgyud pa masters, such as Marpa and Mi la ras pa, there are stories of scolding, beating, and similar ordeals. The student's ability to endure it in turn aids as a proof for his unwavering devotion (Lhalungpa 1986: 47–70).

<sup>44</sup> The Tibetan text for this passage is corrupt ('o na brag tu snang ba de nam mkha' de nam mkha' ltar mi 'dzin par thal/ sems min pa'i sra mkhregs 'gyur med yin pa'i phyir/). A satisfactory solution for translating this sentence could not be found, as an earlier version of this text is not available. An attempt at translation would be: '[Karmapa] said: "Well, that appearing as stone; it follows that this space is not grasped as space, because the solid [here one letter, sometimes 'solid and firm'] which is not mind is unchangeable."' "

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.: 'o na brag tu snang ba de nam mkha' de nam mkha' ltar mi 'dzin par thal/ sems min pa'i sra mkhregs 'gyur med yin pa'i phyir/ zhes dang snang ba sems min na chos thams cad du ma ro gcig min par thal/ rnam rtog chos sku min pa'i phyir/ yang rnam rtog las logs su gyur pa'i chos sku de khyer la shog la [las] nga la ston dang gsung ba sogs chos kyi gsung gleng mang du mdzad do/.

implies the theory of the Great Seal.<sup>46</sup> The Karmapa's demand to bring him such a *dharmakāya* can be regarded as a pedagogical means and resembles the pointing out (*ngo sprod*) of the mind. The embedded dialogue is closed again by the main narrator, who positions the dialogue into a series of discussions (as indicated by the Tibetan 'and so on' or 'such', *la sogs*).

To sum up, the doctrinal point of the dialogue centres on a major Great Seal topic, namely that conceptualisation and *dharmakāya* are essentially equated. The introductory statement and the ensuing objection contrast the metaphysical teachings of the Abhidharma with the Mahāyāna idea that cyclic existence and nirvāṇa are inseparable.<sup>47</sup> The Great Seal traditions further developed this idea into the spontaneous practice of the innate, transcending duality.<sup>48</sup> It is precisely these teachings which dominate the following dialogues.

### 5.2.3 Dialogue with rGya ston Nang so Seng ge ba

This dialogue revolves around a further central term and key concept of the Great Seal, heavily used by sGam po pa and his disciples: the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). In the *Dwags po bka'* 'bum it is used as a synonym for other Great Seal key terms such as 'the innate' (Skt. *sahaja*).<sup>49</sup>

The context in the narrative is that the Karmapa met rGya ston Nang so Seng ge ba, apparently an official from the Eastern Tibetan area of rGya ston, where the young Karmapa had loyal supporters and students.<sup>50</sup> rGya

<sup>46</sup> The term also denotes the third of the so-called four yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) of meditative development in the Great Seal traditions (see Namgyal 1986: 387–93 and Chapter Two (2.1.1)).

<sup>47</sup> Such as for example in the Prajñāparāmitā-literature and Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, XV.2.

<sup>48</sup> This philosophical move allowed for the possibility of sudden enlightenment. The sudden rhetoric often locates the individual already at the end of the path with practice consisting of looking at the nature of mind (Bielefeldt 2005: 238 f.).

<sup>49</sup> Kragh (1998: 34), quoting Shes rab byang chub (*sNying po don gyi gdams pa phyag rgya chen po'i 'bum tig*, *Phyag chen mdzod*, vol. 1, p. 211).

<sup>50</sup> rGya ston Nang so Seng ge ba probably came from the same area (namely rGya ston in Khams) as rGya ston Chos rje and his successor rGya ston bya bral ba Nam mkha'i rgyal mtshan. It is known about rGya ston bya bral ba that he received teachings from Karma 'phrin las pa in 1502 (Karma 'phrin las pa I, 'Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *Dri lan pad ma dkar po*, p. 92) and became an attendant of the Eighth Karmapa from 1507 onwards. He invited the Eighth Karmapa, in 1512, to his monastery 'Brang ra dgon before (*A khu A khra*, fol. 19a/p. 69) and was also recognised by the Eighth Karmapa as the re-embodiment of rGya ston Chos rje (Rheingans 2004: 169). A question and answer text further documents an exchange on various matters (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGya ston bya bral ba'i dris*

ston Nang so Seng ge ba asked him to consecrate statues with rice (among them one of rGya ston Chos rje), whereupon the Karmapa said that the real Buddha or master had melted into the statue. Nang so ba obtained the trust of the Eighth Karmapa being a Buddha.

The next day in Rag yul [at the] Zam kha (bridge), rGya ston Nang so Seng ge ba said: 'You must grant me a dharma [teaching].'

[Karmapa] said: 'In that case, the essence (*ngo bo*) of conceptualisation (*rnam rtog*) is the *dharmakāya*. Therefore conceptualisation and timeless awareness (*ye shes*) being undifferentiated is the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). Much need not be said—that suffices.'<sup>51</sup>

In his answer the Karmapa employs the word 'essence' (*ngo bo*) when explaining conceptualisation to be the *dharmakāya*, unlike in the previous dialogue. This equality of apparently conventional and ultimate terms is then defined as the famous Great Seal term 'ordinary mind' (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). The phrase: 'much need not be said—that suffices', in a way, implies the concept of the *dkar po gcig thub*, the single remedy that cures all.<sup>52</sup> When rGya ston asks the Karmapa to explicate, the Karmapa equates the ordinary mind with various elements:

[rGya ston] asked: 'The ordinary mind and concepts—in which way are they one?'

[Karmapa] points with his finger at three barley grains, which are on a table in front of him (*sku mdun*) and says:

'Concepts (*rnam rtog*), the grains, and the stone of the mountain over there are not different. Empty space (*nam mkha'*) and all the obstructing matter, are similar (*'dra*) in not being different.'<sup>53</sup>

[rGya ston asked:] 'Is there a size (*che chung*) to the ordinary mind?'<sup>54</sup>

[Karmapa] replied: 'To the [ordinary mind] there is no size, nor is there before and after to the ordinary mind.'

*lan*). In 1521, the Karmapa was invited by rGya ston Bya bral ba to rGya ston (*Kam tshang*, p. 320).

<sup>51</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 28a: *phyi nyin rag yul zam kha na rgya ston nang so seng ge bas nged la chos shig gngang dgos zhus pas/ 'o na rnam rtog gyi ngo bo de chos sku yin pas rnam rtog dang ye shes khyad med pa de tha mal gyi shes pa yin/ mang po brjod mi dgos pas des chog gsungs*.

<sup>52</sup> See Jackson, D. (1994: 149–158), for occurrences with sGam po pa's writings and Lama Zhang's *Zab lam mthar thug*.

<sup>53</sup> According to mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, Jan 2007), the *'dra* refers to the last part of the sentence and has the meaning of *gcig*. Usually the *'dra* should be with a referent to compare to, this is rare. It could also refer to the *ci 'dra*.

<sup>54</sup> One may ask oneself whether size here refers to the extent of realisation, but the context suggests the idea of physical size.



[rGya ston asked:] 'Is there a difference between the ordinary mind in the evening and the ordinary mind in the morning?'

[Karmapa] replied: 'All these have no difference. I will explain [it in] detail (*zhib cha*) later (*rjes nas*).'<sup>55</sup>

On the next morning [he] asked: 'Please explain in detail' and [Karmapa] said, 'You [just] ask!'

[And he] said: 'Sir (*lags*), is there [anything] for accomplishing Buddhahood apart from the ordinary mind?'

[Karmapa] said: 'No, there is nothing apart [from it].'

[rGya ston] asked: 'Is there a phenomenon (*chos*)<sup>56</sup> or Buddha not contained ('*dus pa*) within ordinary mind?'

[Karmapa] said: 'Not a single one. If there were, you bring [it] and I will keep (*nya ra*) it!'<sup>57</sup>

Through this array of similes the Karmapa has almost made the ordinary mind into an all-encompassing entity and the single most important point to comprehend about the Buddha's teaching—at least for his recipient. rGya ston Nang so, as one may expect, finally goes on to ask about the cultivation and view to which this teaching is connected:

[rGya ston] asked: 'Does one need to cultivate (*sgom*) this ordinary mind or not?'

[Karmapa] replied: 'Beginners need to cultivate it. Then [later] there is no need [to do so].'

[rGya ston:] 'What view is that?'

[Karmapa:] 'The ordinary mind is [the view]<sup>58</sup>, therefore the fruition, too, is that [view]. If one understands that there is no phenomenon (*chos*) which is not included in the ordinary mind, [one] becomes a Buddha.'<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 28a (p. 87): *tha mal gyi shes pa dang nam rtoḡ gcig tshul ci 'dra yin lags zhus pas/ sku mdun na cog tse'i steng na nas 'bru gsum 'dug pa la phyag mdzud gtad nas/ nam rtoḡ dang nas 'bru dang pha ri'i brag 'di mams la khyad par med/ nam mkha' stong pa dang bem po thogs bcas thams cad tha dad med par 'dra gsungs/ tha mal shes pa* [fol. 28b/p. 88] *che chung e yod zhus pas/ che chung tha mal shes pa la snga phyi med gsung/ do nub kyi tha mal shes pa dang nang par gyi tha mal shes pa la khyad par e yod zhus pas/ de kun la khyad med zhib cha rjes nas byes gsung.*

<sup>56</sup> Here, *chos* might also indicate the Buddha-qualities or properties (Skt. *guṇa*, Tib. *yon tan*; for example *Ratnagotravibhāga* III.4, 6: *tathāgatadharmā*).

<sup>57</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 28b (p. 88): *phyi nang zhib cha gsung bar zhu zhus pas/ khyod kyis dris dang gsungs/ lags tha mal shes pa las logs su sangs rgyas sgrub rgyu e yod zhus pas logs na med gsung/ tha mal shes pa la ma 'dus pa'i chos sam sangs rgyas e yod zhus pas gcig kyang med/ yod na khyod kyi* [read *kyis*] *khyer la shog dang nges nya ra bya gsungs/*

<sup>58</sup> It is likely that the answer refers to the questions. Therefore, for the personal pronouns: 'this, that, the' (*de*), the word 'view' (*lta ba*) was added here.

<sup>59</sup> Literally: 'goes to Buddhahood'.

[Karmapa] continued (*gsungs*): 'The stainless nature of mind (*sems nyid*) cannot be defiled by rocks (*rdo gong*)<sup>60</sup> or stony mountains. If this rock is established in its unfabricated essence, there will come no better *dharmakāya* than the rock. Further, the tail of an old Gya mo dog and the head protuberance (Skt. *uṣṇīṣa*) of a Buddha are one!'

[rGya ston:] 'In what context (*skabs*)<sup>61</sup> is this [taught]?'

And [Karmapa:] 'In the context of the bKa' brgyud pas.'<sup>62</sup>

Cultivation of the ordinary mind is thus for beginners; the advanced practitioner is supposed to let go of any artifice. On the whole this dialogue, revolving around the term 'ordinary mind', functions to bridge path and fruition and the seeming dichotomy of coarse appearances with the *dharmakāya* and—in this context—enlightenment. Strikingly, the Karmapa uses a metaphor to illustrate his point which is found again later: the comparison between an attribute of the Buddha and one of a dog.

#### 5.2.4 Dialogue with dGa' ldan dBon po Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan

The third dialogue is located in a monastery called dGa' ldan, somewhere in Khams, and has meditation as its main topic.<sup>63</sup>

In bSa' gyi khang [Karmapa] had a vision of the King of Śākyas (Buddha Śākyamuni).<sup>64</sup> Then in the valley (*lung*) [of] Ral monastery, on a meadowed

<sup>60</sup> *rdo gong* is, according to mKhan po Nges don, in colloquial Tibetan an expression for stone (*rdo*).

<sup>61</sup> Here the standard translation 'time' for *skabs* does not apply. It rather refers to: 'case, opportunity' (Jäschke 1995) and was translated more freely as 'context'.

<sup>62</sup> A *khu A khra*, fol. 28b (p. 88): *tha mal shes pa de sgom dgos sam mi dgos zhus pas/ las dang po pas sgom dgos gsungs de nas mi dgos gsungs lta ba de ci yin zhus pas/ tha mal gyi shes pa de yin pas 'bras bu yang de yin gsung/ tha mal shes pa min pa'i chos med par go na sangs rgyas 'gro gsungs/ sems nyid dri ma med pa la rdo gong dang brag ri 'di rnam kyis dri ma byed mi thub/ rdo gong 'di spros bral gyi ngo bor grub na rdo gong las chos sku bzang po mi 'ong gsungs/ yang khyi rgan gya bo'i nga ma dang sangs rgyas kyi gtsug gtor gcig yin gsungs/ gang gi skabs su yin zhus pas/ bka' brgyud pa'i skabs su yin gsungs/.*

<sup>63</sup> It could be the dGa' ldan ma mo monastery of the Zhwa dmar pa's, which the Eighth Karmapa visited at a later point, around 1523 (see Chapter Four (4.1.5); for the monastery, see Ehrhard 2002a: 15).

<sup>64</sup> At first the function of the ergative marker seemed unclear, as from other spiritual biographies it was expected that the Karmapa had perceived the vision as agent. mKhan po Nges don, however, has held that it is usually the noble being who does the action of 'looking' (*gzigs*) upon the protagonist of the story and is therefore logically marked by the ergative. Though not seen too often, it occurs frequently in this text. It may be a misspelling of the scribe or else indicate the sometimes variant use of the *byed sgra* and *'brel sgra*. Or else one may rethink the concept of vision: the Tibetan author considers the Buddha the one gazing upon the Karmapa; this means, then, that the Karmapa is able to see him.

plain scattered with flowers, where the Karmapa played a lot;<sup>65</sup> the teacher dGa' ldan dBon po Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and his students offered a *maṇḍala*. And [he] requested:

'Explain a method (*lugs*) for doing meditation.'<sup>66</sup>

In a picturesque setting, the partner in the dialogue is introduced as a devoted student and head (*dbon po*) of a monastery. The first phrase indicates the topic of the dialogue: meditation.

[Karmapa replied:] 'If you wish to meditate, you should [do a meditation] which is like space. This will be sufficient.'

[dBon po:] 'How to do it "like space"?'

[Karmapa:] 'If you do [meditate] like space [meditation or meditator]<sup>67</sup> do not become "like space" [in the literal sense]. The concepts (*rnam rtog*) themselves are space!'

[dBon po:] 'In that case, does one need to give up those concepts through non-conceptualisation?'

[Karmapa:] 'You, hoping to become a good meditator wish to give up concepts.<sup>68</sup> In such a way the [realisation of] the *dharmakāya* itself (*kho na*) will not come about!'<sup>69</sup>

The use of the word space (*nam mkha'*) here is noteworthy. In the *Abhidharmakośa* and *Abhidharmasamuccaya* literature, space (Skt. *ākāśa*, also *gagaṇa* or Apabhraṃśa *gaṇa*, see fn.72) had been incorporated among the uncompounded phenomena, still far from any soteriological

<sup>65</sup> Could be also without an explicit agent 'where plenty of play is done'. Because of the polite form of the verb *mdzad*, however, it is likely that the Karmapa is the one playing.

<sup>66</sup> *A khu A khra*, fol. 29a (p. 89): *bsa' gyu khang du bcom ldan 'das* [fol. 29 b] *śākya'i rgyal pos zhal gzigs de nas ral gyi dgon lung du spang thang me tog bcal du bkram par sku rtse mang du mdzad pa'i sar dga' ldan dbon po nam mkha' rgyal mtshan dpon slob kyis maṇḍal phul nas sgom byed lugs shig zhu zhus pa*.

<sup>67</sup> *Nam mkha' ltar mi 'gro*. One may interpret this shortened phrase to the end that meditation itself should not become like space (*sgom nam mkha' ltar mi 'gro*). Depending on how meditation is comprehended at this stage, it may include the meditator and meditation (which is like space, *nam mkha' 'dra*) are semantically understood as one.

<sup>68</sup> *Bzang por re ba la*. The sentence is syntactically better explained by a grammatical temporal function of the *ba la* ('while ...', also translatable as 'and'), the phrase up to *re ba* being a nominalisation. Or the *re ba la* is more a referent for the '*ong*, which is a verb of going: 'For those hoping ... the realisation of ... will not come.' In either case the meaning remains the same.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. fol. 29b (p. 90): *sgom 'dod na nam mkha' 'dra ba zhiḡ gyis dang des chog gsungs/ nam mkha' ltar ci ltar byed zhus pas/ nam mkha' ltar byed na nam mkha' ltar mi 'gro/ rnam rtog kho rang nam mkha' yin gsungs /'o na rnam rtog de mi rtog pas spangs e dgos zhus pas khyod sgom chen bzang por re ba la rnam rtog spang 'dod lugs kyis chos sku kho na mi 'ong gsungs*.

significance (and a point not accepted by the Theravāda).<sup>70</sup> It is used as a simile for the Buddha-mind in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, and a simile for the pervasiveness of Buddha-nature in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.<sup>71</sup> One finds allusion to mind as space-like in the Indian *dohā* literature and Tibetan songs on the Great Seal.<sup>72</sup>

But rarely occurs the shift from 'like space' (*nam mkha' 'dra*) to the straight 'concepts are space' (*nam mkha' yin*), as the Eighth Karmapa stipulates in this advice to meditation. It exemplifies a free use of metaphor and a vital point in the Great Seal traditions: space as virtually a replacement of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the *dharmakāya*.

This passage outlines another key idea of the Great Seal: concepts do not have to be given up by an antidote (*gnyen po*); antidotes like non-conceptualisation (*mi rtog pa*) are superfluous. In some of the Yogācāra works, for example, it was precisely the nonconceptual awareness (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*) developed on the path of seeing (*darśanamārga*), which overcomes the defilements.<sup>73</sup> Here again, the wish to rid oneself of concepts is

<sup>70</sup> For example, in the *Kathāvatthu* of the Pāli *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* (see Scherer 2005: 85–87). Vasubhandu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* III. 18, too, states for uncompounded phenomena: *ākāṣaṃ dvau nirodhau ca* ('empty space and the two types of extinction'). For the Pāli *Abhidhamma*, see also Ñānātiloka (1983); for the various Buddhist *dharma* theories, see also Willemen (2004: 220–224) and Bronkhorst (1985).

<sup>71</sup> *Ratnagotravibhāga* VIII. 48–49, IX. 51–62 (Takasaki 1966: 237ff.); *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* Ms, fol. 4b, 3–4.

<sup>72</sup> See for example Saraha's *Dohākoṣa* 12, 42a, 42b (ed. Jackson, R. 2004), where it is said to 'grasp the mind as being like space, as naturally spacious grasp the mind to be' using the Tibetan *nam mkha'i 'dra* 'like space' (verse only extant in Tibetan). And also *Dohākoṣa* 72, were the Apabhraṃśa and Sanskrit *kha-sama* 'like space' is used. Space is used also as a synonym for emptiness in Kāṇha's *Dohākoṣa* 7 (ed. Jackson, R. 2004), 'to the degree that emptiness is the 'source', or condition for the possibility, of all forms, so too, space is the source of all the other elements' (Apabhraṃśa here: *gaṇa*). A song attributed to Maitrīpa says: '... the Mahāmudrā, free from extremes, which is like space' (trans. Tsang Nyön Heruka 1995: 28) and again the Tibetan *mkha' mnyam* in Saraha's *sKu'i mdzod 'chi med rdo rje'i glu*, 2: '... suchness, the space like quality of emptiness and appearance' (quoted after Braitstein 2004: 158).

<sup>73</sup> See for example Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama* (trans. Sharma 1997: 92). In the *vastu*-chapter of the *Viniścayaśaṃgrahanī* (of the *Yogācārabhūmi*), too, *vikalpa* has (like *nāman*) basically a negative connotation (Kramer 2005: 34–38), the same holds true for the *Tattvārtha*-chapter of the *Yogācārabhūmi*'s *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Willis 1979: 39–40, and translation of section IV, *ibid.* 125–166). Āryasūtra's *Pāramitāsamāsa* explains that meditation means to overcome wrong concepts (*vikalpa*, here relating to such ideas as permanence, self etc.) in the chapter on the meditation *pāramitā* verse, 70/71 (translation Saito: 2005: 259; edition of the Sanskrit text, *ibid.* 383).

identified as 'hope', an artificial state of mind, which, in fact, leads away from realisation.

[dBon po:] 'Further, please explain to me (*thugs la 'dogs pa*)<sup>74</sup> how to hold the energy-winds and how to meditate on the six doctrines [of Nāropa]?'

[Karmapa:] 'For those very things; you need to understand concepts as *dharmakāya*!<sup>75</sup>

One may interpret these last lines as containing a crucial assumption: this student is informed that the path of Nāropa, too, is accomplished with understanding the liberating insight into the nature of one's thoughts as *dharmakāya*.<sup>76</sup>

### 5.2.5 Dialogue with Mi nyag sKya ging Bya bral ba

Still travelling in Eastern Tibet in the same year, the Karmapa is invited to a place called Me tog ra ba. The dialogue occurs at a place supposedly near this site, which is referred to by the first word *de*. The Karmapa's counterpart in this dialogue can, through his name, be identified as a meditator from region of Mi nyag in Eastern Tibet.<sup>77</sup>

There in the late evening, Mi nyag sKya ging Bya bral ba asked:

<sup>74</sup> Jäschke (1995) gives *thugs la 'dogs pa*: 'to interest one's self (*sic*!) in or for, to take care of' which would rather change the meaning into: 'Do I need to interest myself in the ...' mKhan po Nges don explained that here *thugs la 'dogs pa* means 'to explain' ('further, [you] need to explain from your mind...'), understanding the passage as: *khyod rang gi thugs la yod pa'i gdams ngag nga la 'dogs*. Both versions are convincing. *De ka* or *de kha* is according to Jäschke 'the very same'. Goldstein (2001): *de ka*, 'just that' also sm. to *de ga* 'over there' but also *de ga* similar to *de ka*.

<sup>75</sup> A *khu A khra*, fol. 29b (p. 90): *yang rlung bzung lugs dang chos drug sgom lugs thugs la 'dogs dgos zhus pas/ de ga la mam rtog chos skur shes dgos gsungs/*. It is interesting to note the perfect stem *spangs* here. It may show the (expected) result of the action, namely that one should be able to successfully give up concepts through non-conceptuality.

<sup>76</sup> There is some similarity to a passage in the *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan*: when the First Karmapa had requested instructions on the path of means (*thabs lam*), sGam po pa advised 'that thing that I always teach will do' (*kun tu bshad pa des chog*), referring to the essential teaching that suffices (see Jackson, D. 1994: 153, for a translation of the passage and the Tibetan text).

<sup>77</sup> Mi nyag is a region in slightly eastwards of Khams (Kapstein 2006b: Map 1). Search on the person brought only limited results: Mi nyag rdo rje seng ge (b. 1462) or the dGa' ldan abbot Mi nyag rdo rje bzang po (1491–1554) do both not fit (*Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center*, www.tbrc.org, 15th February 2007).

'These days (*da zhag*) I have experienced sickness and unclear meditation.<sup>78</sup> Kindly assist (*dgos*) me and [give me a means] to remove [these] obstacles.'<sup>79</sup>

To that (*pa la*)<sup>80</sup> the Drung [Karmapa] said:

'You should remove obstacles through the essence of conceptualisation (*nam rlog*)!'

And he further said:

'Do not harbour hope<sup>81</sup> which longs to obtain the result. If [you] harbour hope wishing to obtain the result you are not a good meditator (*sgom chen*). Light rays (*'od zer*) of the Buddha and a dog's hair—the two are not different! Settle [your mind] on those two as [being] in union!<sup>82</sup> In this state, practice the freedom from refuting or accomplishing, the A li kā li conduct<sup>83,84</sup>.

Typical elements seen in the preceding dialogues present themselves: the direct recognition of conceptualisation is advocated as the single, sufficient remedy, be it to do with bodily problems or difficulties in meditation. Apparently, detecting some hope in the questioner's wish for removing obstacles, the Karmapa identifies the wish itself as the very obstacle to true

<sup>78</sup> The *byung ba* can be a forerunner of the later *egophorique* non-intentional of colloquial Tibetan. It implies that something involuntary just happened to one (Kasang Gyurme 1992: 222). Grammatically one can easily refer the *byung ba* to both actions *na ba* and *sgom mi gsal ba*. It would, however, not be entirely wrong to only refer it to *sgom mi gsal ba*.

<sup>79</sup> Jäschke (1995) has for *thugs rjes gzigs* (sm. to '*dzin*'), 'be so kind as to grant ...'. One may think of *gegs sel ba* (nominalised) and then the 'grant' as 'please give me a removal/removing of obstacles'. According to the *bdag gzhan* distinction, the present stem rather than belonging to *bdag* could mean that it is a method of removing obstacles. This was indeed how the mKhan po Nges don semantically explained this sentence. I think both ways of translating would be correct. One could also expect a *sel ba la/ ched du* or at least a connective.

<sup>80</sup> Could also be the temporal function like 'while/after he was asking ... the Karmapa ...'.

<sup>81</sup> Present with an imperative connotation.

<sup>82</sup> The *la don* could here indicate locus (metaphorical): In the union of these two/these two being in union. One may interpret it as *de nyid* as well: 'that they are in union'.

<sup>83</sup> A li kā lī'i *spyod pa*. According to mKhan po it is one kind of tantric conduct. It is neither mentioned within the *Kālacakratra*, ed. Vira R. and L. Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1966) or *Hevajratra*, ed. David L. Snellgrove (London: Oxford University Press, 1959) nor among the four kinds of tantric conduct (Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros and mTshur phu rGyal tshab bKra shis dpal 'byor, *rTsa lung 'phrul 'khor*, p. 168–170).

<sup>84</sup> A khu A khra, fol. 32a (p. 95): *der dgongs phyi mo zhig la mi nyag skya ging bya bral bas nga da zhag na ba dang sgom mi gsal ba byung bas gegs sel thugs rjes 'dzin dgos zhus pa la/ drung nas/ khyod kyis nam rlog gi ngo bo des gegs sel gsungs/ 'bras thob 'dod kyi re ba ma byed/ 'bras bu thob 'dod kyi re ba byas na sgom chen min/ sangs rgyas kyi 'od zer dang/ khyi'i spu gnyis la khyad med/ de gnyis zung 'jug tu zhog/ de'i ngang la dgag sgrub dang bral ba a li kā lī'i spyod pa gyis gsungs/.*

meditation. The goal of enlightenment being constantly present in ordinary things is by now a familiar metaphor: the comparison (or equalisation) of a dog's attribute with the attribute of a Buddha. The discourse ends:

[The Karmapa] then ripped out a single hair (*'jag ma*)<sup>85</sup> of the bedding (*gzims 'bog*)<sup>86</sup> and held it in the hand, saying:

'The three [Buddha] bodies are complete in that!'

[Mi nyag:] 'How are they complete?'

[Karmapa:] 'This very hair is the *dharmakāya*, therefore the *dharmakāya* [is present].<sup>87</sup> As it is standing [upright] (*longs pe 'dug pas*)<sup>88</sup> the *sambhogakāya* [is present]. That it is moved (*sprul sprul*) by wind (*rlung*)<sup>89</sup> is the *nirmāṇakāya*.<sup>90</sup>

Again, an 'ordinary' phenomenon of this world (here the hair from the bed) is used to point out the three bodies of a Buddha in an onomatopoeic word play.<sup>91</sup> This style is accompanied by punning, directness, and word play, as seen in all four dialogues.

<sup>85</sup> Jäschke (1995): '1. A sort of coarse and thick grass of inferior quality. 2. a fragrant grass. 3. *'jag rgod* = horse tail.' Goldstein (2001): 'A thin grass to make brooms and thatching.' mKhan po Nges don comments that *spu 'jag* is here to be understood as one word meaning: 'single hair'. So far not other reference for this assertion could be located.

<sup>86</sup> Goldstein (2001): 'bedding, hon. for *'bog = gzims 'bog* = One word, hon. for "bedding".' According to mKhan po Nges don it is a kind of mattress filled with some sort of animal hair.

<sup>87</sup> Taking the verb *yin* from the end and referring to the other clauses as well. One may also think of an *tshang ba yin* '... is complete'. The word play of *chos sku* is not entirely clear: Either it is the *ka dag* which is referred to or it may be the 'body of phenomena' and hint at the bodily appearance of the hair.

<sup>88</sup> *Longs pe 'dug*. mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, Dec 2007) A colloquialism from Kham which can be considered roughly equivalent to the modern *lang gi 'dug*.

<sup>89</sup> *sprul sprul* is most likely an onomatopoeic reduplication. The meaning of *sprul* is here like *sprug*, as it appears that forced by the previous word play (and not by misspelling) the author is using *sprul* which is also part of the Tibetan word *sprul sku* ('emanation body', Skt: *nirmāṇakāya*). The Tibetan has a connective particle (*'brel sgra*) after the 'wind' (*rlung*). One may either amend the connective to an ergative marker (as usually demanded by *tha dad pa* voluntary verb *byed pa* and referring to the understood subject-like argument *spu de ka*), or consider the connective as interchangeable with the ergative (which sometimes occurs in texts). Or one may read it as connective, interpreting the phrase *sprul sprul 'byed pa* as a nominalisation connected to the noun *rlung* forming the whole nominalisation 'the making of movement of the wind'. In that case, however, one would omit the understood *spu de ka*. It was therefore translated as 'moved by the wind'.

<sup>90</sup> A *khu A khra*, fol. 32a (p. 95): *gzims 'bog gyi spu 'jag btogs nas phyag tu bsams nas/ sku gsum 'di la tshang ba yin gsung/ ci ltar tshang ba yin zhus pas/ spu de ka chos sku yin pas chos sku/ longs pe 'dug pas longs sku/ rlung gi* [read *gis?*, see note 88 above] *sprul sprul byed pa sprul sku yin gsungs/*.

<sup>91</sup> The Tibetan verb 'to stand' (*longs*), for example, corresponds to a part of the Tibetan word (with a different meaning) for *sambhogakāya* (short: *longs sku*).

### 5.2.6 Conceptualisation and Dharmakāya

The closer examination supports the previously stated reasons for inserting the dialogues at precisely this place in the narrative, suggesting that these embedded passages embody the narratological function of portraying the Eighth Karmapa as a realised teacher, particularly so in the Great Seal (and 'nature of mind' teachings). It is worth noticing that all dialogues take part in proximity to the passages addressing the issue of the other Karmapa-candidate. The dialogues operate through the narrative technique of showing (as opposed to telling), leaving no doubt about the Karmapa's capacity to give advice on advanced practices.

The texts can further be regarded as a vehicle for instructions on the nature of mind for the reader via the means of dialogue, a device popular in the Buddhist but also in other traditions.<sup>92</sup> This supports the view of the spiritual biography genre, at least in part, consisting of instruction.<sup>93</sup>

With regard to historical questions about the authenticity and origin of the dialogues, additional sources are scarce and one is left to careful speculation. Given the detail the source reserved for other events, it is unlikely that the entire dialogues were wholly imagined by the author, A khu a khra, (or any other compiler) without any related event. As a Karmapa, even a very young one, his every word and deed were seen to convey religious purpose. The not so elaborate terminology supports that the composition of the dialogues derives inspiration from an early interaction of the young Karmapa. In that case, A khu a khra probably witnessed these or similar events and made notes (*zin bris*) at some stage.<sup>94</sup>

On the other hand, A khu a khra, as former secretary of the Seventh and attendant of the Eighth Karmapa, had a strong agenda to picture this boy as an authentic teacher. This interlocks with the narratological analysis; the Karmapa's young age further raising doubts.<sup>95</sup> It is improbable that the dialogues were noted down in the teaching situation and are a close record of the Eighth Karmapa's words. Historical truth may lie in between these

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<sup>92</sup> Keller (1978: 89–90) considers dialogues (and instructions) typical genres in mystical writings. In the Indian Mahāyāna traditions, the debate-like dialogue (*pūrvapakṣa*) is quite common. Dialogues are also found in the Zen works (Beyer 1974: 264), in the writings of Śāṅkāra's *Upadeśasāhasrī* (Hacker 1949), and the Persian mystic Rūmī (Keller 1978: 89–92).

<sup>93</sup> Willis (1995: 5) and Chapter Three (3.3).

<sup>94</sup> For A khu a khra and the circumstances of this text as noted in this section, see Chapter Three (3.4).

<sup>95</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1225, calls him *dpon chen* of the Seventh Karmapa.



possibilities. Given their doctrinal and rhetorical similarity, it can at least be assumed that the dialogues stem from a single author.<sup>96</sup>

These speculations notwithstanding, their doctrines offer clues for how the Great Seal was perceived to have been taught by the Eighth Karmapa. Though not explicitly stated, all dialogues revolve around teachings about the nature of mind and are rooted in the rhetoric of immediacy. The recognition of the nature of mind as *the* liberating insight is clearly put forward along with instructing conceptualisation as *dharmakāya*, bearing similarities to the tradition of sGam po pa. It seems that the Great Seal as liberating insight is considered crucial for the practice of the Six Doctrines of Nāropa (dialogue three), indicating the over-arching importance of the essential Great Seal teaching, which was ascribed to Maitrīpa.<sup>97</sup>

Strikingly, three of the four dialogues employ a similar metaphor for pointing out the sameness of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, bodily parts of a dog are viewed as an expression of enlightened mind. Taking into account the rhetorical and doctrinal similarity of the dialogues, it can be concluded that the doctrinal content does not clearly depend on the addressee, but represents a relatively coherent doctrinal layer. What seems to depend on the recipient is the varying approach to the topic. And the 'doctrinal layer' is more a way of instructing that attempts to point out the essence of thoughts, and ordinary appearances as *dharmakāya*, in other words: enlightenment.

### 5.3 Answer to Gling drung pa's Query on the Great Seal<sup>98</sup>

It was mentioned previously that question and answer texts (*dris lan*) document a *written* exchange on various doctrinal issues as opposed to a dialogue or conversation. The *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan* (Answer to a Question Asked by Gling drung pa La 'dor ba) is such an exchange,

<sup>96</sup> Although the time of composition, redaction, and transmission of the text remains vague, the Eighth Karmapa's own title list, from 1546, indicates that the text was already complete by that year (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 5a/p. 358). The other contemporary sources rely heavily on this text as source, but the dialogues did not find entry into them, apparently not deemed crucially important for the general outline of the Karmapa's life.

<sup>97</sup> This shift probably took place during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Jackson, D. 1994: 82–84; see Chapter Two (2.1.3)).

<sup>98</sup> The same but slightly differently presented discussion of this *dris lan* is supplied in Jim Rheingans, 'The Eighth Karmapa's Answer to Gling drung pa: A Case Study', *Mahāmudrā and the Bka'-brgyud Tradition: PIATS 2006: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies Bonn*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein and Roger R. Jackson (IITBS: Halle, 2010), 345–386.

presenting remarkable doctrinal and historical details centring around the criticism of Sa skya Paṇḍita and the distinction of tantra and the Great Seal.

### 5.3.1 *The Addressee and Other Contexts*

To date, only the version of the text published in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* is available.<sup>99</sup> It is not that easy to understand the exact context of this work and to identify the recipient, but slightly more rewarding than in most of the dialogues. The title on the title page reads *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, and the name of the recipient appears here as *Gling drung pa La 'dor ba*. Whereas the name mentioned in the first lines of the text reads *Gling A mdong Drung pa*,<sup>100</sup> the entry listed in the *dkar chag* of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa reads *Gling drung pa a mdong pa'i dris lan* (*Answers to Questions of Gling drung A mdong pa*).<sup>101</sup>

As the editors of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* were imprecise at other times, the title in the much older *dkar chag* is more reliable, the name being *Gling drung A mdong pa*. This is further supported by the first line of the text itself, which is a variation rather than a misspelling.<sup>102</sup>

*Gling* or *Gling tshang*, the place of the questioner as expressed by the name, is a designation of an Eastern Tibetan kingdom.<sup>103</sup> In the spiritual biographies about the Eighth Karmapa, two slightly contradictory referenc-

<sup>99</sup> As has been pointed out above, the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* contain some misspellings. The supplement to the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* talks about various sources for the publication. The *dris lan* probably stems from two versions of manuscripts stored in 'Bras spungs (1a), manuscripts from the Po ta la (1b) of the 'Bras spungs manuscripts, or the more obscure category of 'whatever writings and prints that were found in dBus and gTsang' (Karma bDe legs, *dPe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 6: *kham dbus kyi bris dpar ci rig rnyed pa rnams*). See Chapter Three (3.2).

<sup>100</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 1b.

<sup>101</sup> *dkar chag*, fol. 5b (p. 9).

<sup>102</sup> The elements of the name are three: place (i), title (ii), and further specification (iii), probably of place of origin. Looking at the first reading, we find *Gling* as the place (i), *Drung* as a title (ii), and 'He of La 'dor' (*la 'dor ba'i*) as a further specification (iii). The third version has as specification (iii) 'He of A mdong' and thus deviates slightly. The second version merely puts the title (ii), *Drung*, to the third element of the name and has as second element again 'He of A mdong' (*A mdong pa*). Thus the actual variation consists of *A mdong pa* versus *La 'dor ba*, which are probably two scribal attempts at writing what was originally one name.

<sup>103</sup> Geographically, it is an older name of what would later become the kingdom of sDe dge and is still the name of the nomadic areas north of sDe dge. Between 1400 and 1637 the *Gling tshang* ruled over large areas in Eastern Tibet (Kessler 1983: 17).

es indicate that the Karmapa travelled to the area and passed on teachings to members of the Gling family in the year 1519. With regard to major events of the Eighth Karmapa's life, this was the last of three years he trained under his revered main teacher, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa bKra shis dpal 'byor, and, probably together with this master, travelled around in Eastern Tibet.<sup>104</sup>

The *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* states that he had a vision of Nāgārjuna and was then 'invited by Gling drung pa gTing 'od pa,<sup>105</sup> uncle and nephew, and went to Zil mdar.'<sup>106</sup> There he was offered presents and it is further said that he gave 'prophecies and letters' (*lung bstan dang chab shog*) to a lCags mo kun ting Go shri, as well as 'prophecies and instructions' (*lung bstan dang gdams pa*) to a Gling drung pa.

The later source, Si tu and 'Be lo's *Kaṃ tshang*, recounts the events in a different manner. It says—at a similar place within the narrative—that the Eighth Karmapa was invited by the Gling tshang ruling family. He then had a vision of Nāgārjuna in Tsi nang and spent a month in Ba zi mdo.<sup>107</sup> Then he went to the mGo zi hermitage and imparted many 'prophecies' (*lung bstan*) to a Gling drung pa gTing 'dzin bzang po.<sup>108</sup>

Though in general the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* is the older and more detailed source, it is assumed that Si tu's statements about geography are more accurate.<sup>109</sup> At least later, mGo zi (or Guzi) in North West sDe dge was a site of a Ngor pa monastery.<sup>110</sup> The monastery in Zil mdar or mGo zi

<sup>104</sup> See Chapter Four (4.1.4).

<sup>105</sup> Probably short for gTing ['dzin] 'od [zer] pa.

<sup>106</sup> *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1233: *gling drung pa ting 'od pa khu dbon gyi spyang drangs/ zil mdar phebs/ khri rwa can gyi 'bul ba dang dbon gyi thog drangs pa'i gra pa yang brgya lhaq phul/ der [p. 1234] lcags mo kun ting go'i sri 'od zer rgyal mtshan pa la 'das ma 'ongs kyi lung bstan chab shog gnang/ gling drung pa la lung bstan dang gdams pa gnang/ tsher phur drung pa grub thob pa la dus 'khor 'grel chen gsan pa na dus kyi 'khor lo dang rje mi la gzigs pa rje grub thob pa la thim par gzigs nas bstod par mdzad/.*

<sup>107</sup> This is probably Si tu's version of the *zil mdar* in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*.

<sup>108</sup> *Kaṃ tshang*, p. 316: *gling tshang gyi gdan drangs/ tsi nang du 'phags pa klu grub zhal gzigs/ ba zis mdor zla gcig bzugs/ mgo zi ri khrod du phebs Gling drung pa gting 'dzin bzang por lung bstan mang po mdzad.*

<sup>109</sup> Looking at the differences in the two sources examined above, it has to be taken into account that (i) Si tu and 'Be lo may have had access to two early sources, which are lost to date (Chapter Three (at the end of 3.4)), and (ii) that Si tu was from sDe dge and was well acquainted with this region and its history.

<sup>110</sup> The Si tu incarnation prior to Si tu Paṇ chen had been born into the family of the Ngor pa patrons (written communication, D. Jackson, June 2007). For the Ngor pa, see also Jackson, D. (1989b).

was most likely the bKra shis rnam rgyal monastery of the Gling drung pa, mentioned once in a *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* as among the monasteries in which the Karmapa erected buildings.<sup>111</sup> The question remains, whether the two Gling drung pas mentioned in the two sources, Gling drung pa gTing 'dzin bzang po and Gling drung pa gTing 'dzin 'od zer, are two different persons or whether the difference constitutes a name variation. Furthermore, which one among them can be identified with the unspecified Gling drung pa mentioned a second time in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*? Most importantly, who was Gling drung A mdong pa, the addressee of this text?

While the title of this work is mentioned in the *dKar chag* of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, it is not included in the list of the Eighth Karmapa, dated 1546.<sup>112</sup> The presence of the title in the list of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa proves that a text with such a title existed. The colophon of the *dris lan* itself bears no date:

.... he, who only sees a fraction of the Great Seal of bKa' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje, Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje, sent this to mDo khams. May through the virtue of that all beings become liberated by means of the Great Seal!<sup>113</sup>

The traditional deferential 'who only sees a fraction of the Great Seal' points to the Eighth Karmapa as the author. The colophon also indicates that the *Answer to Gling drung pa* was a written teaching or a letter (as opposed to the student making notes in a teaching situation) composed by the Karmapa somewhere in dBus and sent to mDo khams (where the student presumably received it).

A plausible option would be that the answer was written after 1546, and did therefore not find entry into the Karmapa's title list. Only after the Eighth Karmapa's passing were all documents related to the teaching of the revered master assembled by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa and compiled into a collection.<sup>114</sup> The work would then stem from a period of the Eighth Karmapa at his height of scholarship and teaching.

<sup>111</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs* fol. 10b (p. 369): *Gling drung pa bkra shis rnam rgyal gyi sde*.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 4a–9b (pp. 356–367).

<sup>113</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 3b: *bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje ba'i phyag chen gyi phyogs mthong tsam zhig karma pa mi bskyod rdo rjes mdo khams su brdzangs pa'i dge bas 'gro kun phyag chen gyis grol bar gyur cig*.

<sup>114</sup> The other option would be that the text was authored earlier but only gathered and inserted into the collection at a later point by the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa.

It is known that the Karmapa first visited Gling drung around 1519, yet the answer was probably written after 1546. Presuming there is no thirty year gap between question and answer, a reasonable assumption is that the recipient of this text, Gling drung A mdong pa, came from the milieu of the other Gling drung pa mentioned in the spiritual biographies, and is most likely a relative or nephew of those. Perhaps the Gling tshang lords were devoted to the Ngor pa already at that time.<sup>115</sup>

Neither of the Gling drung pas is mentioned among the lists of students found in the spiritual biographies about Mi bskyod rdo rje. It is thus probable that he did not belong to the closest bKa' brgyud pa students of the Eighth Karmapa but, as his question reveals, he had received Sa skya pa and Ngor pa teachings, and also considered the Karmapa as his teacher or at least a competent scholar. It was pointed out in Chapter Four that Mi bskyod rdo rje taught the graded tantra path only from his twenty-seventh year onwards to a restricted number of individuals.<sup>116</sup> If one deems the content of the *dris lan* as at least in part belonging to this category, one can assume a sincere teacher-student relationship between Gling drung pa and the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>117</sup>

### 5.3.2 The Content

The one question directly addresses the key issue in the debates about the Great Seal:<sup>118</sup>

I will answer [the question that] Gling A 'dong Drung pa from Khams has asked:

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<sup>115</sup> A further indication of Mi bskyod rdo rje's relation to the Gling tshang lords is his letter *rGyal chen gling pa ma bu la gnang ba'i chab shog* (not containing the name Gling drung pa). The assumption about the Ngor pa is based on the question asked.

<sup>116</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i mam thar*, fol. 6a/p. 340. See Chapter Four (4.3).

<sup>117</sup> The *dris lan* contains tantric teachings in distinguishing the tantras (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 1b, see below), but is mainly about the Great Seal of sGam po pa. The Great Seal was, as noted above, taught also at an early stage in the Karmapa's life and is not considered a tantric exposition. But we may still assume that it was taught only to worthy students. The question, tone, and content of the *dris lan* further supports the idea that Gling drung pa was a student of the Karmapa, though—as will be discussed below—to precisely determine their relationship, along with the political circumstances, may substantially contribute to an understanding of the contents.

<sup>118</sup> See Chapter Two (2.1.3).

'Are the two, the meaning of the fourth empowerment of the unsurpassable mantra as held by the glorious Sa skya pas<sup>119</sup> and the meaning of the Great Seal as taught by bKa' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje, the same or different? Is there a difference between them as to higher and lower?'<sup>120</sup>

In his answer, the Karmapa first explains the meaning of the fourth empowerment according to what he had heard from 'some lamas' of the Sa skya Ngor branch, probably alluding to the questioner's background.<sup>121</sup> They would maintain that one blocks out conceptual objects, concentrating on the self-empty essence of the feeling of joy resulting from the third empowerment. But he admits not being completely sure about the definition of the Ngor pa.<sup>122</sup>

He then goes on to outline what he considers a more general view on the matter; namely that, in general (*spyir*), there are two kinds of empowerment in the *\*niruttara-tantra*, 'mundane' (*'jig rten pa*) and 'supramundane' (*'jig rten las 'das pa*). The *Kālacakratatantra* would be the only tantra belonging to the supramundane category:

Because in the father tantras, such as the cycles of Guhyasamāja and Yamantāka, and in all the mother tantras, such as *Cakrasaṃvara[tantra]* and *Hevajra[tantra]*, there is taught nothing [else] than the four empowerments of the world, therefore the Vajradhara who will be accomplished through the creation- and completion-stages of these [tantras] is a surpassable (*bla bcas pa*) Vajradhara.<sup>123</sup>

The Karmapa explains that the *karma*- and *jñāna-mudrā* of the third empowerment used for achieving the fourth empowerment are those for obtaining the worldly *siddhi*.<sup>124</sup> What is reached with these mundane em-

<sup>119</sup> 'Unsurpassable' (*bla med*) refers to the unsurpassable *yoga-tantra*, the *\*niruttara-yoga-tantra*.

<sup>120</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 1b (p. 312): *dir khams nas gling a 'dong drung pas/ dpal sa skya pas 'dod pa'i sngags bla med kyi dbang bzhi pa'i don dang/ bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje pa'i bzhed pa'i phyag rgya chen po'i don gnyis gcig gam mi gcig/ /de la mchog dman yod med ji ltar yin zhes drir byung ba la/ lan brjod par ba ste/*.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.: *gsang 'dus 'jigs byed gshed skor sogs pha rgyud/ bde dgyes sogs ma rgyud thams cad nas* [fol. 2a/p. 313] *'jigs rten pa'i dbang bzhi las ma bstan pas/ de dag gi bskyed rdzogs kyi lam gyis sgrubs pa'i rdo rje 'chang yang bla bcas pa'i rdo rje 'chang yin pa'i phyir te*.

<sup>124</sup> To determine the actual meaning of the teachings in this passage, more specific research is needed, which would exceed the scope of the present thesis. A part of the context will be provided in Chapter Six (6.3). The passage here is nevertheless paraphrased roughly to give an impression of the Karmapa's red thread in his answer and seems to be in line with some of his other works. As a first indication, similar teachings can be found in the bulky *sKu*

powerments is also called 'inferior Vajrasattva' (*rdo sems nyi tshe ba*). Only with the supramundane empowerments from the Kālacakra will one attain the ultimate goal: the 'pervading Vajrasattva' (*khyab pa'i rdo sems*). In this system, the third empowerment bringing forth the ultimate wisdom of the Great Seal (the fourth empowerment), is not mixed with the worldly *siddhis*. Through this Great Seal of the extraordinary primordial Buddha (Tib. *dang po'i sangs rgyas*, Skt. *ādibuddha*) the Great Seal itself (*phyag rgya chen po nyid*) is brought to accomplishment.<sup>125</sup> The discussion on the first part of the answer is summed up:

Therefore, concerning the supramundane fourth empowerment which comes from the *Kālacakra*[*tantra*] and the fourth empowerment, which comes from [tantras] such as *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Guhyasamāja*, there is higher (the former) and lower (the latter); what the authorities on tantra mention (*smra bar byed pa*) when saying [thus] is that, which exists for the tantras as conceptual objects of [verbally expressed] knowledge.<sup>126</sup>

Thus, the Karmapa has set out to answer the question by first differentiating how he understands the fourth empowerment, emphasising the superiority of the Kālacakra-system.<sup>127</sup> But he has not yet touched upon the Great Seal

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*gsun ngo sprod*, which the Eighth Karmapa began to compose in mTshur phu in 1548, and completed in the same year in Thob rgyal dgra 'dul Gling in gTsang. Here the term 'surpassable Buddha' (*bla bcas kyi sangs rgyas*) is used to indicate the result of practising tantras not belonging to the *anuttara* class (vol. 21, fol. 236b/p. 469). The Karmapa also explains that there are mundane and supramundane empowerments within the Kālacakra system, leading to different results, again using the same term (vol. 21, fol. 345a/p. 668). Mi bskyod rdo rje uses a similar line of argument with mundane and supramundane empowerments and quote of Saraha, saying how the view and realisation (*lta ba dang rtogs pa*) of the Great Seal, which is the *buddhagarbha*, the naturally pure *dhātu*, would be beyond those objects known by mundane ultimate awareness (*ye shes*) (*dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung*, fol. 45aff./p. 555). At the end of his ritual for Kālacakra practice, the Eighth Karmapa praises it as the 'ultimate vehicle' (*bCom ldan 'das dpal dus kyi 'khor lo*, fol. 117b/p. 617: *mthar thug gyi theg pa*). It will be necessary to, in the future, evaluate Mi bskyod rdo rje's commentary on Kālacakra *bCom ldan 'das dang po'i sangs rgyas*, and tantric works of the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (see also Schaeffer 1995) as well as Bu ston.

<sup>125</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 2a (p. 313).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. fol. 2b (p. 314): *des na dus kyi 'khor lo nas 'byung ba'i 'jig rten las 'das pa'i dbang bzhi pa dang/ bde gsang sogs nas 'byung ba'i dbang bzhi pa la mchog dman yod ces rgyud sde mkhan po rnam smra bar byed pa ni shes bya spyi pa la rgyud yod pa'i de yin/*. For the last slightly cryptic passage, one would expect and read *par rgyu la yod pa*. It is assumed from the context that the statement means, that Karmapa and other scholars accept this distinction.

<sup>127</sup> The Kālacakra-system is often viewed as the pinnacle of tantra; a corresponding passage in *Kālacakratāntra*, V. 243: 'In every kind of tantras, the Vajrin concealed the vajra-word, and in the Ādibuddha, he taught it explicitly and in full for the sake of the liberation of

of the bKa' brgyud pa, which is the main concern of the questioner. In the following he introduces it as that of sGam po pa:

The Great Seal of the bKa' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje cannot be harmonised with the question as either the same or different from the supramundane and mundane fourth empowerment from the tantra scriptures. The 'Bri gung pa 'Jig rten gsum gyi mgon po has said: 'Beyond the four joys, something different from the clear light (*'od gsal*), untouched by the three great ones.'<sup>128</sup> The Great Brahmin (Saraha), too, has said:<sup>129</sup> 'the innate natural (*gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa*) Great Seal, the meaning of the *dohā*, cannot be realised through the fourth empowerment.' And in the *dMangs dohā* [he has said:]

'Some have entered the explanation of the sense of the fourth [empowerment], some understand [it] as the element of space (*nam mkha'i kham*s),<sup>130</sup> others make it a theory of emptiness;<sup>131</sup> hence, mostly [people] have entered what is incompatible<sup>132</sup> [with it].'<sup>133</sup>

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living beings. Therefore, Sucandra, the splendid Ādibuddhatantra, a discourse of the supreme lord of Jinas, is the higher, more comprehensive and complete tantra than the mundane and supramundane [tantras]' (translation by Wallace 2000: 6).

<sup>128</sup> The Karmapa quotes the same saying by the 'Bri gung pa in his *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* (fol. 6b). Ruegg (1988: 1259, n. 43) has noted that other 'Bri gung pa *dgong gcig*-texts interpret it as referring to *dbu ma chen po*, *phyag rgya chen po*, and *rdzogs pa chen po*. This refers to dBon po Shes rab 'byung gnas, *Dam chos dgongs pa gcig pa'i gzhung*, fol. 5a; and Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Dam pa'i chos dgongs pa gcig pa'i mam bshad*, fol. 36a ff. (see also Karmay 1988: 197, n. 95). The *chen po gsum* here are not related to the three *mudrā*, e.g. *karma*-, *dharma*-, and *samayamudrā* as opposed to the *mahāmudrā* (*rGya gzhung*, vol. oṃ, p. 571).

<sup>129</sup> *Dohākoṣa* 12 (Jackson, R. 2004). The whole complex in Saraha's *Dohākoṣa* is a refutation first of non-Buddhists, then Hīnayāna (10), Mahāyāna (11), and Mantrayāna (11ff.) (Schaeffer 2000: ad loc.).

<sup>130</sup> Tib. *nam mkha'i* = Apabhraṃśa: *āāsa* or *gaāṇa*; Tib. *kham*s = Apabhraṃśa: *bhūa* (Tilopa 1, 1a in Jackson, R. 2004).

<sup>131</sup> Note the textual variants given by Schaeffer (2000 esp. app. crit. on 48: AA = Advaya Avadhūti, *Do ha mdzod kyi snying po'i don gyi glu'i 'grel pa*): *gzhan dang stong pa nyid lta bar byed pa de*; L (*Do ha mdzod* prepared by Lha btsun pa Rin chen rgyal mtshan): *lta bar byed pa ste*.

<sup>132</sup> *Mi mthun phyogs*. This part of the verse is only available in Tibetan. The translation 'contradiction', favoured by both Schaeffer (2000: 277) and Jackson, R. (2004: 12) could be also understood differently (also Shahidullah 1928: 129 *ad stanza* 11). Because *mi thun phyogs* = Old Bengali/Maithili *bipakṣa* (cf. *Caryāgītī* 16 [Mahitta], 4d Kværne 1977:142: *re bipakṣa kobī na dekhī*); Munidatta ad loc. *punaḥ kleśam vipakṣi-karīṇaṃ na paśyati* (Kværne 1977: 144: Tib.: *mi mthun phyogs bye dpa mi mthong ba'o*). This suggests a meaning such as 'obstacle' which was here translated as 'not compatible with it'. Still *vipakṣa* could also have the Indian logical meaning of counter-example or counter-argument: 'By maintaining this (emptiness) they provide a counter-argument for the non-conceptual state of awareness.' Interpreting it as 'contradiction', Shahidullah (1928) has 'propositions contradictory' and 'the contrary' (cf. Udayana [eleventh century], *Ātmātattvaviveka*, Laine 1998: 74). For *sapakṣa*—*vipakṣa* as Indian /Buddhist logical



Mi bskyod rdo rje avoids classifying sGam po pa's Great Seal as tantra or not. Then he interprets Saraha's term 'the fourth' (*bzhi pa*) as the fourth empowerment, suiting his purpose to prove the fourth empowerment as not necessarily in accordance with the Great Seal.<sup>134</sup> The Karmapa finally imparts what he considers the key point of the Great Seal, again putting it forward as that of sGam po pa.

In that case, as for the Great Seal upheld by the bKa' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje: in the great timeless (*ye*) freedom from the impurity of experience, realisation, view, and meditation of the four mundane and supramundane empowerments and so forth, one settles in the unfabricated *om sva re*<sup>135</sup> while it [the Great Seal] appears spontaneously as the primordial Buddha, the timeless presence itself!<sup>136</sup>

The strong term 'impurity' (*dri ma*) denotes the meditation achieved by empowerments, and is juxtaposed with the simple, effortless, resting in the mind's true nature—a classic statement of the rhetoric of immediacy. This time the Karmapa sets the Great Seal of the bKa' brgyud apart from the tantric empowerments and their practices. This point is emphasised with anti-ritualistic rhetoric:<sup>137</sup>

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terms, see Ram-Prasad (2002: 345–6: 'homologue'); Ganeri (2003: 38: 'heterologue'); Barnhart (2001: 557: 'example and counter-example/counter-positive example'); Staal (1962) (according to Ram-Prasad 2002: 346): 'logical equivalence through contraposition'. Shaw (2002: 216) has *pakṣa* = 'locus of inference'.

<sup>133</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 2b (p. 314): *bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje ba'i phyag rgya chen po ni rgyud sde las 'byung ba'i 'jig rten dang 'jig rten las 'das pa'i dbang bzhi pa dang gcig mi gcig bstun tu yod pa min te/ 'jig rten gsum gyi mgon po 'bris khung pas/ dga' ba bzhi las 'das pa/ 'od gsal las khyad par du gyur pa/ /chen po gsum gyis ma reg pa zhes gsungs pa ste/ bram ze chen po sa ra has kyang gnyug ma lhan cig skes pa phyag rgya chen po do ha'i don ni dbang bzhis pas rtogs par mi nus zhes dmangs do har/ /la la bzhi pa'i don 'chad pa la zhugs/ la la nam mkha'i khams la rtogs par byed/ gzhan dag stong nyid lta bar byed pa ste/ phal cher mi mthun phyogs la zhugs pa yin/ zhes 'byung ba'i phyir/.*

<sup>134</sup> In this interpretation he follows the thirteenth century Tibetan writer bCom ldan ral gri, alias Rig pa'i ral gri; see Schaeffer (2000: 276).

<sup>135</sup> According to mKhan po Nges don (oral communication, August 2007), it is a colloquialism occasionally used by lamas even today, meaning: 'leave it as it is/it is just that'.

<sup>136</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 2b (p. 314): *'o na bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje ba'i bzhed pa'i phyag rgya chen po ni/ 'jig rten dang 'jig rten las 'das pa'i dbang bzhi sogs kyi nyams rtogs lta grub kyi dri ma dang ye bral chen por gdod nas* [fol. 3a/p. 315] *'/ye bzhus nyid ye sangs rgyas su lhun gyis grub par 'char ba la ma bcos om sva re 'jog pa las/.*

<sup>137</sup> Mathes (2006: 207) has concluded that the Indian material on Saraha takes a sceptical stand towards 'traditional forms of Buddhism including Tantra'. See also Schaeffer (2000: 7) and Jackson, R. (2004: 19–20).

Apart from that [settling the mind as stated above], there is [no way] that one will realise the accomplishment of the Great Seal through tiresome [activities] such as to go and ask for empowerment, to ring the bell, to recite [mantra] while meditating on a Buddha aspect, and to collect yam-wood and make fire offerings; or to carry out an [extensive] meditation ritual after having collected offering [substances].<sup>138</sup>

The Karmapa had, however, not yet explicitly answered whether the fourth empowerment of the Sa skya pa or the Great Seal could be considered superior. This question is touched upon by recounting a story from the period of earlier masters in the twelfth century, which also forms the end of this text.

When formerly the glorious Phag mo gru went into the presence of the Sa skya pa Kun [dga'] snying [po], [Phag gru] acted as local tutor (*gnas slob*)<sup>139</sup> for Khams pa sBas mchod and [Phag mo gru] attended the Bla ma [sBas mchod] as not different from the Sa skya pa.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 3a (p. 315): *de la dbang bskur zhur 'gro ba dang/ dril bu 'khrol ba dang/ lha bsgoms nas bzlas pa dang/ yam shing bsags nas spyin bsreg bya ba sogs dang/ 'bul sdud byas nas sgrub mchod 'dzugs pa sogs kyi ngal bas phyag rgya chen po'i dngos grub sgrub pa ma lags/*

<sup>139</sup> Zhang Yisun: *gnas kyi slob dpon* = 'local teacher' (also *gnas sbyin pa'i slob dpon* = 'teacher that gives lodging') – '*dul ba las bshad pa'i slob dpon lnga'i nang gses/ gnas 'cha' ba'i slob ma la dgag sgrub gnam gsum gyi bslab bya slob par byed pa'i dge slong*. This is one of the five teachers for monks as mentioned in the Vinaya. Mi bskyod rdo rje himself, in his Vinaya commentary, considers *gnas kyi slob dpon* = *gnas kyi bla ma* one of the five teachers explained in the Vinaya, his role being to assist the monk in the three trainings and see to his pure and stable conduct ('*Dul ba mdo rtsa rgya cher 'grel*, fol. 133b) and being the one who directly engages with the student in the dharma (ibid. fol. 191b). The question is (see note 138 below) whether we are dealing with the formal sense of the word as a teacher of the newcomer monk, or rather a senior teacher introducing a visiting monk to a monastery. *Bod skad dang legs byar tshig mdzod chen mo: gnas byin pa - niśrayadāyakaḥ*, from *Mahāvīyutpattiḥ*, 8731 (also *niśrayadāpikaḥ*, *niśrayadāpakaḥ*) 'he that gives lodging'.

<sup>140</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 3a (p. 315) (Tibetan text, see below, note 141). From the context one would read: '[Sa chen] made sBas mchod the *gnas slob* [for Phag gru].' The passage requires some discussion, because the grammar and the context suggest contradictory readings. Grammatically, it would be most likely that Phag gru (being in the phrase before, marked with the absolutive as the argument, one would call 'subject' in indo-european languages of the verb *byon*), made the *gnas slob* for sBas mchod as marked by the dative. Alternatively, but less likely, Sa chen could have been acting as *gnas slob* for sBas mchod. From the next clause (*sa skya pa dang khyad med du bla mar bsten*), and bearing in mind the context of the story (see also the further works by Phag mo gru pa discussed below), however, it is clear that it was the sBas mchod whom Phag gru attended as not different from the Sa skya pa. The *gnas slob* is normally the monk who introduces the newcomer to the monastery (see note above and e-mail communication, D. Jackson, August 2007). It seems thus that Khams pa sBas mchod acted as Phag mo gru pa's *gnas slob*; meaning he acted as his personal preceptor, the senior monk who takes responsibility for a junior monk. This again is grammatically unlikely

Later, Phag mo gru pa went into the presence of the Master (*rje*) sGam po pa. He completely let go of the experience of the Great Seal of the fourth empowerment [which he had received] from the Sa skya pa and actualised the Great Seal of Dwags po Lha rje and his bKa' brgyud [lineage], the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*).

At that time, Sa chen passed away and Khams pa sBas mchod went to Khams. The talk of the Sugata Phag gru being fully awakened (*sangs rgyas pa*) came up in Khams and sBas mchod [went] to Sugata Phag gru [and] requested the instructions of the Great Seal, saying:

'[You] must grant me the instruction which [made] you a Buddha, the Great Seal.'

In answer [to that he says] in the *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba* (*Granting the Innate Union of the Great Seal*), which is to be found in the *bka' 'bum* of Sugata Phag gru:

'As far as I am concerned, my trust in you and the great Sa skya pa is the same. Therefore it would not be right if I taught you the Great Seal; nevertheless, since I cannot bear if someone like you falls into a mistaken path, I must by all means offer<sup>141</sup> [you] the Great Seal—so please excuse me!'

[Phag gru] said, and in fact he even did something like confessing<sup>142</sup> [a misdeed].<sup>143</sup>

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(possible with adding a *du* = *slob dpon du*, thinking of the *la* for sBas mchod as indicating the object = '[Sa chen] made sBas mchod the *gnas slob* [for Phag gru]' or '[Phag gru] made sBas mchod [his] *gnas slob*'). But Phag gru had finished his Vinaya-education by that time (1134; Schiller 2002: 62). We are left with the following possibilities: (i) The text may be corrupt or (ii) we have a particular construction and sBas mchod was indeed the *gnas slob* of Phag gru. Or, not disregarding the grammar present in the available version: (iii) Phag gru acted as *gnas slob* for sBas mchod, who was otherwise Phag gru's teacher. (iv) Sa chen himself was *gnas slob* for sBas mchod (second reading), indicating such a closeness between him and sBas mchod that Phag gru attended him as his teacher. There is also the possibility of a later addition to the story (see the following discussion in the main text).

<sup>141</sup> The polite '*bul*' is used, which indicates the respect towards sBas mchod ('offer [you] the Great Seal [teaching]'); the Tibetan double negation could also be expressed as 'I cannot refuse to'.

<sup>142</sup> *mthol bshags*. Literally: 'to admit [mistakes]' (Zhang Yisun: *mthol bshags – rang gi nyes pa mi gsang bar shod pa* 'to declare one's faults without concealing').

<sup>143</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 3a (p. 315): *sngon nas sa skya pa kun snying gi drung du dpal phag mo gru pa byon dus khams pa sbas mchod la gnas kyi slob dpon mdzad/ sa skya pa dang khyad med du bla mar bsten/ phyis phag mo gru pa rje sgam po pa'i sku mdun du phyin sngar sa skya pa'i dbang bzhi pa'i phyag rgya chen po'i nyams de drungs nas 'byin par mdzad/ bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje ba'i phyag chen tha mal gyi shes pa de mngon du mdzad/ de skabs sa chen gshegs/ khams pa sbas mchod khams su phyin/ bder gshegs phag gru sangs rgyas pa'i skad khams su byung nas spas mchod kyi bder gshegs phag gru'i sku mdun du khyed sangs rgyas pa'i gdams ngag phyag rgya chen po de la [read: nga] gnang dgos zer nas phyag chen gyi gdams pas/ de'i lan du phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba bder gshegs phag gru pa'i*

Finally, by way of a story which appears to be a somewhat sectarian anecdote, the Karmapa gave an opinion about the main question. Part of this story may reflect the Karmapa's attitude toward Gling drung pa. Though calling the path that Khams pa sBas mchod has previously practised a 'mistaken path' (*lam log pa*) is comparatively strong language, there is a polite strand in the opening of the story, and it seems that Phag mo gru pa felt uncomfortable to teach his former tutor, apologising in the end.<sup>144</sup>

### 5.3.3 *The Story of sBas mchod: Pedagogy, History, and the Great Seal*

Upon reading the above passage, this research has found some historical questions striking. The story of sGam po pa's precepts being more profound to Phag mo gru pa than anything he had practised before, is a well known rhetoric of the bKa' brgyud pa spiritual biographies and played a role in the polemical exchange about the Great Seal.<sup>145</sup> But who was Khams pa sBas mchod? Can the Karmapa's alleged source for this story, a text by Phag mo gru pa, be located?

During his stay in Sa skya, Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170), later one of the foremost students of sGam po pa and the source of the eight minor bKa' brgyud traditions, also obtained the *lam 'bras* instructions from Sa chen Kun dga' snying po (1092–1158).<sup>146</sup> The *lam 'bras* instructions and practice—'the way along with the result' is central to the

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*bka' 'bum na yod pa de nang na/ khyed dang sa skya pa chen po la nga ni dad pa mnyam por yod pas/ ngas khyed la phyag rgya chen po bstan mi rigs [fol. 3b/p. 316] kyang khyed lta bu lam log par ltung na mi btub pas phyag chen mi 'bul ka med byung ba yin pas bzod par gsol zhes don gyis mihol bshags lta bu'ang mdzad gda' pas/.*

<sup>144</sup> It can also be speculated to whether the Karmapa felt certain unease upon writing his reply and therefore ended it with this story and the comment that Phag gru even admitted a harmful action.

<sup>145</sup> Schiller (2002: 74–75). The use of this story in teaching could be regarded as dismissing Sa skya pa attacks as jealousy about Phag mo gru pa's development with sGam po pa (Jackson, D. 1994: 108).

<sup>146</sup> Stearns (2001) has done excellent research on the early masters of the *lam 'bras* tradition, including a section on Phag mo gru pa's *lam 'bras* teaching. Schiller (2002) has worked extensively on the life of Phag mo gru pa. Both have used the historically significant Tibetan sources. The *lam 'bras* instructions and practice are central to the Sa skya tradition, and Sa chen Kun dga' snying po (1092–1158) authored eleven explanations on it (Stearns 2001: 16–26).

Sa skya tradition.<sup>147</sup> And Sa chen, being one of the foremost early Sa skya pa masters, was a practitioner and major lineage master of this meditational technique that deals with the *Hevajratantra* and with Hevajra's consort, Nairātmya. According to some sources, Phag mo gru pa was one of Sa chen's very close and most learned students, and played a major role in the earliest compilation of the *lam 'bras*.<sup>148</sup> The Sa skya pa sources tell us that he had spent approximately twelve years in Sa skya (probably 1138–1150).<sup>149</sup>

The figure of Khams pa sBas mchod surfaces in bKa' brgyud pa spiritual biographies: it seems that Phag gru met a dGe bshes dBas (sic!) in Khams (where he was born and had started his religious career) and Phag gru apparently accompanied him in 1130/31 to dBus. However, dBas eventually went back to Khams and there is no further trace of him.<sup>150</sup> Only later, a dBas mchod is mentioned among the close students of Phag gru, the only time where the same name is used as in the answer to Gling drung pa.<sup>151</sup>

A search for the Eighth Karmapa's alleged source may help to shed light on some of the issues: the *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor ngang ba*, is said

<sup>147</sup> For *lam 'bras*-instruction, and the early history of the lineage of its masters in Tibet, see Stearns (2001). A brief overview of the Sa skya tradition in English is Thub bstan legs bshad rGya mtsho (1983). An essential Tibetan history is *Sa skya pa gdung rabs chen mo* by Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams.

<sup>148</sup> His notes were even considered too clear (which is not recommended for oral instructions), and were therefore placed in the library by Sa chen and named 'the library explication' (*dpe mdzod ma*). The bKa' brgyud pa source of Padma dkar po adds that he was Sa chen's most learned student (Stearns 2001: 27, 180 n. 133, 181 n. 114).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 27, 180 n. 113; Schiller (2002: 66).

<sup>150</sup> Schiller (2002: 59) has discussed various possible dates between 1127 and 1131. According to rGyal thang pa, Phag gru accompanied dGe bshes dBas chen po to dBus when he was twenty-nine years old (1138) (*dKar brgyud gser 'phreng*, p. 401), whereas Schiller using Chos kyi yes shes translates that he accompanied a dBas rDo rje chen po when he was twenty-two and they went to sTod lung rGya mar, where Phag gru spent some time with him, conducting himself in a manner 'not different from him' (*khyad med du*). But then dGe bshes dBas wanted to go back to Khams, and Phag gru, because dBas had supported him, hesitated, but stayed (*Chos rje rin po che'i rnam thar*, fol. 4af.). Most sources seem to agree that Phag gru took full ordination in 1134 in Zul phu (Schiller 2002: 62). Later Phag mo gru pa went to Sa skya. But where was dGe bshes dBas? That may lend credibility to the assumption (ii); (see note above) namely, that Phag gru may have been in Sa skya before, acting as *gnas slob* in the sense of assisting dGe bshes dBas in the monastery. Otherwise dBas was his senior. But why does he state that he had the same trust in the Sa skya pa as in dBas? Are we dealing with the same person?

<sup>151</sup> Schiller (2002: 87), who refers to dPal chen chos kyi ye shes, *Chos rje rin po che'i rnam thar*, fol. 24a.

to be in the collected writings (*bka' 'bum*) of Phag mo gru pa, but did not find entry into any of the published versions or available early lists, nor is the story found among related works on *lhan cig skyes sbyor*.<sup>152</sup> But in another section of Phag mo gru pa's *bka' 'bum* there are three letters or advices to a dGe bshes sPas, also called sPas dGe bshes Byang chub brtson 'grus.<sup>153</sup> The Karmapa's answer had introduced Khams pa sBas mchod as someone Phag mo gru pa had the same trust in as he did in Sa chen (*dad pa mnyam po*). Phag mo gru pa uses similar phrases in the instruction to sPas dGe bshes Byang chub brtson 'grus (in the earlier manuscript *Phag gru bka' 'bum* referred to as sBas dGe bshes chen po): he mentions that this lama cared for him kindly previously and he excuses himself, saying that his devotion towards the Sa skya pa and him would be the same, indicating that he had formerly acted as his teacher.<sup>154</sup>

The second work hints at a similar relationship: the instruction Phag gru gave to a former dharma-friend (*mched grogs*), the dGe bshes dBas chen po.<sup>155</sup> Both texts contain meditation instructions, but neither of them uses explicit *phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor* precepts.

Although the *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba* quoted by the Karmapa was not found, these texts and the spiritual biographies indicate at least the existence of a dGe bshes sBas, who was Phag gru's teacher before he met sGam po pa. The dBas dGe bshes chen po mentioned in the instruction<sup>156</sup> most likely refers to the very Khams pa sBas mchod from the *dris lan*, who, as his name suggests, probably came from Khams and belonged

<sup>152</sup> During his doctoral research on Phag mo gru, Schiller has surveyed all early *dkar chag* and different editions of Phag mo gru pa's literary works and is certain that such a title does not occur (oral communication, August 2007). In a sixteenth century manuscript from 'Bri gung (*Phag gru bka' 'bum*), the *lhan cig skyes sbyor* section does not contain the title nor is the content found within these works (*Lhan cig skyes sbyor*, vol. 2, no. 8. fol. 48b.3–55a.5; *Phyag rgya chen po'i ngo sprod*, vol. 2, no. 9. fol. 55a.5–58b.3; *Lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi skor*, vol. 2, no. 10. fol. 58b.3–66a.6). See also the same corpus on *lhan cig skes sbyor* in the 2003 edition *Phag gru gsung 'bum*, vol. 4, 255–351.

<sup>153</sup> The sPas dGe bshes byang chub brtson 'grus la phag gru pas gdams pa (*Phag gru bka' 'bum: dGe bshes dbas chen po la [gdams pa]*, vol. 3, fol. 333b–334b) is most likely the same person as Khams pa sBas mchod. The *Byang chub brtson 'grus la springs pa'i nyams myong gnyis pa* (*Phag gru bka' 'bum: dGe bshes dbas chen po la spring pa*, vol. 3, fol. 270b–272a) contains a similar hint in the colophon. The *dGe bshes spas la spring ba* (*Phag gru bka' 'bum: sPas la bskur yig*, vol. 3, fol. 274b–274b) does not contain any concrete hint but could have been directed to the same individual.

<sup>154</sup> Phag mo gru rDo rje rgyal po, *sPas dGe bshes byang chub brtson 'grus*, p. 718: *bla ma sa skya pa dang khyed bzhugs pa la mos gus mnyam par mchis*.

<sup>155</sup> Phag mo gru rDo rje rgyal po, *Byang chub brtson 'grus la springs pa*, p. 381.

<sup>156</sup> Phag mo gru rDo rje rgyal po, *sPas dGe bshes byang chub brtson 'grus*, p. 718.

to the sBas clan,<sup>157</sup> as did Phag mo gru himself.<sup>158</sup> The issue with the *gnas slob*, however, remains obscure and may indeed be a later addition to the story.

Given the evidence above, it is unlikely that the Karmapa himself imagined a text called *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba* without any literary source.<sup>159</sup> It is still puzzling whether the Karmapa referred to the same instruction to sPas dGe bshes byang chub brtson 'grus under a different title or text, whether he relied on another textual source not yet found, or whether he knew of the story but paraphrased it freely.<sup>160</sup> And, as is still typical in the field of Tibetan studies, many sources have not yet become available.<sup>161</sup>

### 5.3.4 Great Seal beyond Tantra

Though some context remains to be clarified, this question and answer text bears testimony to how the Karmapa approached a polemically loaded Great Seal question from a student with probably a Ngor pa and Sa skya background and how the Karmapa adapted his instruction for this particular

<sup>157</sup> A fifteenth century encyclopaedia notes, that sPas (variants: sBa, rBa, sBas, dBa's) is a clan among the rJe cig sNyags rJe Thog sgrom rJe lineage, one of the four princely lineages of sTong. It was one of the most important in the Royal dynastic period (Gene Smith's introduction to Don dam smra ba'i seng ge, *A 15th Century Tibetan Compendium of Knowledge*, p. 16, and the Tibetan text in *ibid.* p. 183).

<sup>158</sup> It remains to be clarified how exactly their relationship was (for example what the Karmapa meant with the role as *gnas slob*), how close sBas mchod was to Sa chen and whether we are dealing with one and the same person dGe bshes dBas alias Khams pa dBas mchod. For this research, the sources on Sa chen's life have not been examined in detail. C. Stearns (e-mail communication, Sept. 2006) has not come across this name yet.

<sup>159</sup> This was a written answer by a well informed scholar, who clearly states the title and source. The Eighth Karmapa was, for example, also familiar with works of other masters of that period, such as Lama Zhang. The Karmapa transmitted the reading transmission (*lung*) of his collected writings (*Kaṇi tshang*, p. 339).

<sup>160</sup> Of course there is always the possibility that the Karmapa's *dris lan* has undergone some editing.

<sup>161</sup> It will, in the future, be important to try to validate the authenticity of this text and the associated story. Apart from the early bKa' brgyud pa sources, Mi bskyod rdo rje's teacher Karma 'phrin las pa could have served as its origin. He transmitted Phag gru's *lam 'bras* instructions to some scholars in Nalendra and must have been knowledgeable about the history of both the Sa skya and bKa' brgyud traditions (Stearns 2001: 29). For the life and works of the first Karma 'phrin las pa, see the unpublished Master's thesis, Rheingans (2004). Unfortunately his *gsung 'bum* is not complete (for a catalogue see *ibid.* 143–195) and remarks about a Khams pa sBas mchod could not yet be found in the available material.

student. As such, the work presents a window into some of the religious and political circumstances in that area and its ensuing tensions: the ambivalence of the enquirer who was probably devoted to two traditions;<sup>162</sup> his question, which almost presupposes the answer; and the anecdote within the *dris lan*, which—albeit sectarian—the Karmapa utilises to underline his opinion without *telling* it directly.<sup>163</sup>

Doctrinally, the answer first distinguishes the tantras into mundane and supramundane. Mi bskyod rdo rje then puts forward the Great Seal as a teaching impossible to call ‘either the same or different’ from the tantras, a feature emphasising its method as going beyond tantric ritual. Mi bskyod rdo rje does not present an argument here (as he does elsewhere) nor clearly state a path for Great Seal practice, apart from telling the student to let mind rest without any effort (*ma bcos*).<sup>164</sup> In that, the teaching style resembles the Karmapa's dialogues depicted above.<sup>165</sup>

He does not further label this approach in the *dris lan*, apart from presenting it as that of sGam po pa and Saraha. It seems to be in line with the approach of Saraha, and with what is termed the ‘path of direct cognition’ by sGam po pa or ‘essence Great Seal’ in the later categorisations of Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas and bKra shis chos 'phel.<sup>166</sup> It may correspond to the Eighth Karmapa's remark that, when teaching the Great Seal, he stressed the traditions of the *dohās* transmitted via Vajrapāṇi.<sup>167</sup> On

<sup>162</sup> They may have competed in the Gling area. Here, further research will have to follow up this hypothesis. Mi bskyod rdo rje's main rivals were, apparently, the dGe lugs pa and 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (1527–1592), but also some unease among the Sa skya pa's in gTsang is reported due to his disproportionate influence (cf. Sangs rgyas dpal grub, fol. 38b).

<sup>163</sup> As in a narrative text which works with either *showing* (by means of metaphor, images etc.) or *telling* (directly relating its message) (Cobley 2001: 5–7).

<sup>164</sup> For example in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *gLo bur gyi dri ma*, fol. 1b (p. 1074) and *dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung*. His argumentative strategy is a topic on its own.

<sup>165</sup> This rhetoric of the Great Seal as particular also occurs elsewhere in the instructions of Mi bskyod rdo rje. See for example Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i bshad pa rtogs brjod*, fol. 2b, where it says that the Great Seal forms the base of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa but not the all-base (*kun gyi gzhi*) of the *pāramitāyāna* nor the one of the explanatory tradition (*bshad srol*) of the general Secret Mantra, this being the special feature of Nāropa and Maitrīpa.

<sup>166</sup> See Chapter Two (2.1.1, 2.1.2). Saraha pointed out the possibility of realisation by merely relying on the kindness of one's guru (Mathes 2011; Jackson, R. 2004: 37–40, see esp. Chapter Six (6.4, 6.5)). We find the idea of a third path with sGam po pa (Sherpa 2004: 130; Jackson, D. 1994: 25–28).

<sup>167</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b (p. 367); see Chapter Four (4.3). Mi bskyod rdo rje was certainly well acquainted with the collection of Indian Great Seal works compiled



the other hand, as pointed out in the following case study, at times the Eighth Karmapa was opposed to considering the Buddhist tantras as inferior to a sūtra-based Great Seal.<sup>168</sup>

#### 5.4 Identifying the Blessing: A Mantra Path

The *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin* (Identification of the Blessing of the Great Seal), stems from the advice (*bslab bya*) section of the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*.<sup>169</sup> At the outset of this instruction, the Karmapa emphasises the importance of blessing (*byin rlabs*) for training in the practice of the Great Seal.<sup>170</sup> He explains his view of how to receive the blessing which one should follow, opening with the basic statement:

To my view, [the blessing] is similar to the proceeding of: the basis, union of clarity and emptiness; the path, union of the two accumulations; and the result, union of the two buddha-bodies.<sup>171</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa continues to outline the base, path, and fruition according to the tantras. How does one receive the blessing and practise the path? Under the heading of the Great Seal path (*lam phyag chen*) he first comments on the correct meditations of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, elaborating on the correct manner of practice and the experiences arising from these.

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by the Seventh Karmapa (*rgya gzhung*). His teacher Karma 'phrin las pa (1456–1539) who commented on Saraha's *dohā*-cycle, had studied the *dohā* under the Ras chung sNyan rgyud master Khrul zhig Sangs rgyas bsam grub (fifteenth century) and the Seventh Karmapa before authoring his commentary (for Karma 'phrin las pa's studies and teaching Mi bskyod rdo rje see Rheingans 2004: 61–67, 75–85; for the significance of his *dohā* commentaries see Schaeffer 2000: 9ff.). There is no explicit mention of Karma 'phrin las pa or Sangs rgyas mnyan pa transmitting Saraha's *dohā* teachings to Mi bskyod rdo rje; and the Eighth Karmapa—albeit quoting Saraha frequently—did not compose a formal commentary on the *dohā*.

<sup>168</sup> See also *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 7b (Rumtek editions); this is discussed in Chapter Six (6.4).

<sup>169</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, fol. 2a. Not much is known about the historical circumstances and the audience of this work. The first pages of the text are missing and the second part starts with a prostration to Sangs rgyas mnyan pa (ibid. fol. 1b: *Pha mnyan pa'i chen po'i zhabs la bdud*). In the colophon, the name Mi bskyod rdo rje is not mentioned. This title, however, is mentioned in both title lists (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 7b; *dKar chag*, fol. 7a). It is thus likely that the Eighth Karmapa composed this text.

<sup>170</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, fol. 2a (p. 737).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.: *nga yi go ba ltar/ gzhi gsal stong zung 'jug/ lam tshogs gnyis zung 'jug/ 'bras bu sku gnyis zung 'jug gi 'gros shig pa 'dra/*.

He suggests practising them in union (*zung 'jug*) as taught in the sūtra way, but immediately goes on to explain:

As for meditation of the Great Seal, it is the path of the unsurpassable yoga (*rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i lam*). Therefore, the special features of the quick path (*nye lam*) of the Vajrayāna need to be practised in a complete manner (*tshang bar*).<sup>172</sup>

Indeed, for him, in this text the Great Seal is both a method and a goal realised through practice of the Buddhist tantras; the fact that he comments on the general meditations of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* beforehand, implies their preliminary value to the actual tantric practice. Here, the complete practice of Vajrayāna entails receiving the four empowerments from an authentic teacher and the practice of the two stages of tantric meditation, which the Karmapa briefly describes with various examples. Thus the Great Seal, the highest accomplishment (*siddhi*), is achieved.

This should be known from the esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) of an authentic teacher. The text goes on to quote various masters on the process of tantric meditation, among others, Saraha, Nāgārjuna, and Asaṅga. The Karmapa finally explains the result of the Great Seal; namely, the state of a Vajradhara and the three Buddha-bodies. Quoting various masters, Karmapa underlines the importance of practice under the guidance of a teacher and in accordance with one's capacities, not forgetting basic contemplations.<sup>173</sup>

One needs to remember that the context indicated by the title was the blessing of the Great Seal—blessing being connected to the Vajrayāna—and this is exactly the understanding of the Great Seal he conveys.<sup>174</sup> Yet, this advice is in striking contradiction to the reply to Gling drung pa analysis previously.

This chapter has first outlined the criteria of examined texts and the rubrics of analysis for selected case studies. These have illustrated how the Eighth Karmapa guided specific students in Great Seal meditation and

<sup>172</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, fol. 3a (p. 739): *phyag rgya chen po'i sgom ni/ rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i lam yin pas/ rdo rje theg pa'i nye lam gyi khyad chos rnams tshang bar nyams su len dgos pa yin/*.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. fol. 4a (p. 740). The quotes of various masters on the process of tantric meditation are on ibid. fol. 4a–5b/p. 741–743. For the result of the Great Seal, see ibid. fol. 5b/p. 743; for the need to do Buddhist practice according to the capacities of the individual, see ibid. fol. 6b/p. 745.

<sup>174</sup> Also sGam po pa labelled the mantric paths to the Great Seal the 'path of blessing' (see Sherpa 2004: 129–37, 142–50).

expounded its theory to them. In each case the particular context was discussed as much as sources have allowed.

The first case study—dialogues about the Great Seal—has proven to be an example of an unelaborated and direct discourse about the nature of mind. It has clearly stressed the understanding of conceptualisation as, in essence, *dharmakāya*; though in quite direct, non-philosophical, language. Historical and narratological analysis have demonstrated that these dialogues may go back to events when the Eighth Karmapa was a young boy. Though the value of narratology was limited, it has complemented the investigation and helped to create a different angle of analysis, highlighting the importance of the text's function.

The second case study—the reply to Gling drung pa—has raised a key sectarian debate (the Great Seal versus the fourth empowerment of the Sa skya pa). Next to an unusual tantric distinction, it has used the 'beyond rhetoric' in emphasising Great Seal of sGam po pa and Saraha as not being 'the same or different from tantra' but somehow nevertheless 'beyond'. It has allowed insight as to how the Karmapa approached this delicate question and adapted it to the addressee. The main strategy was to tell a story. This story in turn highlighted the person of dBas mchod, a student of Phag mo gru pa, unnoticed in the academic study of the early bKa' brgyud pa history.

But 'Great Seal' was then used differently in the *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, the last case study, where it clearly designated mantric practices and their results. This divergence points to various angles of explication, possibly adapted to each disciple in a pragmatic manner.

It should be remembered that the *dris lan*, and many other minor instructions, were marginal works taught to particular individuals and must not reflect a standard view. They allowed, however, for valuable insights into teaching approaches and strategies. How far these formed a consistent doctrinal layer with other commentaries, or how far they were adapted to each addressee, remains to be clarified. Additionally, questions as to how to approach a study of the Great Seal need to be raised.



## Chapter 6

### Contextualising the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal Instructions

This chapter resolves to analyse key ideas that arose in the case studies in further sources and attempts to come to terms with the divergent interpretations discovered therein. It sets out to isolate doctrinal elements which permeate the investigated Great Seal teachings. It then turns to the teacher as crucial religious origin and means of instruction, investigating the function of confidence (*dad pa*) and devotion (*mos gus*) in some Great Seal instructions of the Eighth Karmapa.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.1 Basic Distinctions of the Great Seal

In general, the Eighth Karmapa maintains that Great Seal instructions originate from Saraha. Saraha himself expounded on the Great Seal from the perspective of affirmation, whereas his student Nāgārjuna taught from that of negation.<sup>2</sup> In his Madhyamaka commentary, *Dwags pa'i sgrub pa'i shing rta*, the Eighth Karmapa stresses Maitrīpa's approaches as crucial for the Great Seal.<sup>3</sup> Maitrīpa's *Tattvadaśaka* and Sahajavajra's commentary *Tattvadaśakaṭīka*, along with Jñānakīrti's *Tattvāvatāra* and the songs of Saraha are employed to that end.<sup>4</sup> According to the Karmapa, Maitrīpa's

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<sup>1</sup> A further elaboration of these reflections can be found in Jim Rheingans, 'Communicating the Innate: Observations on Teacher-Student Interaction in the Tibetan Mahāmudrā Instructions,' in *Buddhist Philosophy and Meditation Practice*, ed. Khammai Dhammasami, Padmasiri de Silva, Sarah Shaw et. al. (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand: International Association of Buddhist Universities, 2012), 177–202. While the outcome of further research about Mi bskyod rdo rje's Great Seal that has just appeared (Draszczyk and Higgins 2016) improves our insights into his doctrines, the approach and thesis discussed here remains valid.

<sup>2</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Glo bur gyi dri ma*, fol. 1b (p. 1074).

<sup>3</sup> Chapter Four (4.1.6), has uncovered some conditions surrounding the composition of this important work. That he wrote it late in his life (1544/45), and the high esteem it received in his traditions, points to it being the culmination of his scholastic enterprise.

<sup>4</sup> Mathes (2006: 225). For further extensive research about Maitrīpa and the Indian background, see the pioneering work by Mathes (2015).

understanding of Madhyamaka included the teaching of Saraha the elder and younger along with Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti.<sup>5</sup> Quoting the *Tattvadaśaka*, the Karmapa comments on the verse outlining the *pāramitāyāna* pith instructions, which are to be practised adorned with the words of the guru.<sup>6</sup> The Karmapa calls Maitrīpa's understanding *amanasikāra-madhyamaka* 'non mentation Madhyamaka', distinguishing three types:

- i. Practices focusing on Mantra-Madhyamaka
- ii. Practices focusing on Sūtra-Madhyamaka
- iii. And those focusing on the Alikakāra-Cittamātra-Madhyamaka.<sup>7</sup>

The first two (i and ii) were taught by Marpa and Mi la ras pa, the second (ii) was emphasised by sGam po pa, and the third (iii) is the one of the vajra songs (*dohās*) as propagated by Vajrapāṇi of India, A su of Nepal, and Kor Ni ru pa.<sup>8</sup>

## 6.2 Interpretations of Conceptualisation as Dharmakāya

How then is the key doctrine from the dialogues of Chapter Five explained in further sources? As for the much-debated second approach (ii), which sGam po pa taught frequently, the Karmapa explains in the Madhyamaka commentary: it was labelled 'Great Seal', a name which usually denotes bliss and emptiness in the Vajrayāna. Understanding such a Madhyamaka/ Great Seal as explained by sGam po pa would be called 'actualising the

<sup>5</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6a (p. 11).

<sup>6</sup> *Tattvadaśaka* 92: *na sākāranirākāre tathatām jñātum icchataḥ/ madhyamā madhyamā caiva gurvāganalaṅkṛtā*. Mathes (2006: 209) translates: 'Somebody who wishes to know suchness for himself [finds it] neither in terms of *sakara* nor *nirakara*; Even the middle [path] (i.e., Madhyamaka) which is not adorned with the words of a guru, is only middling.' According to Mathes (2006: 213–216), the Eighth Karmapa interprets 'the words of the guru' here as those of Nāgārjuna, whereas 'Gos Lo tsā ba comprehends it as the pith instructions of the guru, who embodies Prajñāpāramitā.

<sup>7</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6a (p. 11). See also Ruegg (1988: 1248ff.); Brunnhölzl (2004: 52); Sherpa (2004: 172).

<sup>8</sup> The Eighth Karmapa claimed to have emphasised the *dohās* as transmitted via Vajrapāṇi in his teaching of the Great Seal (see Chapter Four (4.3), and *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 9b/p. 367). Though the Karmapa in the Madhyamaka commentary accepts this Madhyamaka type, he argues against the Alikakāra-Cittamātra (of Ratnākaraśānti) (Ruegg 1988: 1275). For the *dohās* as taught by Vajrapāṇi, see also Tatz (1994); their Tibetan transmissions are discussed in Karma 'phrin las pa's famed *Do ha skor gsum gyi ſika* (see Schaeffer 2000).

ordinary mind' (*tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad*) or 'directly realising the *dharmakāya*' (*chos sku mngon sum du byas*).

If one understands that a phenomenon (Tib. *chos can*, Skt. *dharmīn*), such as a sprout, and conceptualisation (*nam rtog*) is not established apart from its thusness (Skt. *tathatā*), this is given the conventional expression (*tha snyad*) 'conceptualisation arises as *dharmakāya*'.<sup>9</sup> Here, the fundamental theme from the dialogues studied in Chapter Five is expounded in a more scholarly manner, reminding one that 'conceptualisation arises as *dharmakāya*' is a mere designation.

Being a key concept of Great Seal practice, doctrinal formulations about conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* surface in the question and answer texts of the Eighth Karmapa. The concise reply to a question by a certain Bla ma Khams pa<sup>10</sup> sets out to explain the view, 'that there exist in an unmixed manner two minds (*sems*) in the mental continuum (*rgyud*) of all beings.'<sup>11</sup> It presents the Eighth Karmapa's reception of the Third Karmapa's and 'Bri gung pa's doctrines.

Referring to the Third Karmapa's *Zab mo nang gi don*, Mi bskyod rdo rje relies on a teaching well known from the *Ratnagotravibhāga*<sup>12</sup>: the pure aspect, the Buddha nature inherent in beings, shows itself in the three phases: impure (for ordinary beings), pure and impure (for bodhisattvas), and completely pure (for Buddhas). How does the impure aspect of mind come about? The mind is in essence (*ngo bo*) empty, its nature (*rang bzhin*) clear, and its expression (*nam pa*) is unhindered—but this is not known by itself (*rang gis rang ma rig*). Therefore the mind at first (*sems dang po*) is

<sup>9</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6b (p. 12): 'di'i dbu ma'i lta ba brgyud la skyes pa na tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad ces pa dang/chos sku mngon sum du byas zer ba dang/chos can myu gu dang nam rtog sogs de dag de'i chos nyid las gzhan du ma grub par rtogs ba na nam rtog chos skur shar ba zhes tha snyad mdzad nas.

<sup>10</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, 3 fols. The text concerns what one may term the theory of the Great Seal. Lama Khams pa is specified in the colophon (fol. 3b/p. 223) to have been the lama of Bla ru, uncle and nephew. The place, where the Karmapa composed the text, was Zul phud. Little more could be found about the questioners in other reference works or the spiritual biographies of the Eighth Karmapa. This text found entry in the works of the Eighth Karmapa and can already be found both in the *dKar chag* of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa and the title lists of the Eighth Karmapa. A full translation and more extensive discussion can be found in Draszczuk and Higgins (2016).

<sup>11</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, fol. 1b (p. 220): *sems can thams kyi rgyud la sems gnyis ma 'dres par yod pa'i bstan bcos snying gi thur ma 'di brjod pa'i ched du phyag rgya chen po la phyag 'tshal lo*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ratnagotravibhāga*, I.51b; see also Burchardi (2000) and Ruegg (1989), for its reception in Tibet.

timeless awareness (*ye shes*), and at the same time obscured by ignorance, which is called 'consciousness' (*rnam shes*). Conventionally (*tha snyad du*), the former is an existing phenomenon, the natural, self arisen, inherent, undeluded Buddha nature.<sup>13</sup>

How then, if there are these two minds, can one maintain that conceptualisation is, in essence, the *dharmakāya*? It is not incompatible for one mind stream to have both the natural state (*gnyug ma*) and the superficial defilements (*glo bur gi dri ma*), as the defilements are no other substance than the natural state (*gnyug ma'i sems*), which is the *dharmakāya*, also identified with the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). The path consists of giving up fabrications (*bcos pa*) by assembling the conditions of training in the proper instructions and to rest in the natural state, thus realising that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are inseparable.<sup>14</sup> Despite a specific terminology, the pith instruction boils down to a point similar to the answer to Gling drung pa.

In the answer to Shel brags Bla ma Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, distinction is made between scholastic explications and more direct instructions.<sup>15</sup> Shel brags Bla ma had asked the Eighth Karmapa about the opinion that conceptualisation not being *dharmakāya* is in contradiction with the scriptures of sūtra and tantra. The Karmapa, quoting from both the Prajñāpāramitā-scriptures and the *Hevajratāntra* illustrates that the two not being different (*tha dad min*) does not mean being the same (*gcig*). He maintains: there would be no contradiction of cyclic existence and *nirvāṇa* being without difference in not being truly existent (*bden par ma grub par*). But they would be different in existing as unreal (*bden med du grub par*).<sup>16</sup> After a brief discussion employing various arguments and examples he concludes:

<sup>13</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, fol. 1b (p. 220).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. fol. 2a (p. 221).

<sup>15</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Shel dkar bla ma chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi dris lan*. This is apparently one of a number of replies to this Shel brags pa (who is in the page title of this work called Shel dkar Bla ma Chos kyi rgyal mtshan). The *dris lan* immediately preceeding in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* has his name as Bla ma Shel brag pa Nyi zla ras chen Chos kyi rgyal mtshan. According to the colophon, he belongs to the Karma bKa' brgyud pa followers in the g.Yar klung area (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma shel brag pa nyi zla ras chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi dris lan dgu pa*, fol. 5a/p. 266).

<sup>16</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Shel dkar bla ma chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi dris lan*, fol. 1b (p. 268): *rnam dag ye shes gzugs can dang/ 'khor ba rnam par rtog pa gnyis/ /khyad par cung zad yod ma yin/ 'khor ba spangs nas gzhan du ni/ mya ngan 'das pa rtogs mi 'gyurl*. These lines mix the last three *pāda* of *Hevajratāntra* I.x.32 (as edited by Snellgrove 1959) (*paścāt tattvaṃ samākhyātaṃ viśuddhaṃ jñānarūpiṇaṃ/ saṃsāravavyavadānena nāsti bhedo*



I also maintain conceptualisation as *dharmakāya*. However, the establishing of conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* which is in accordance with the scriptures you have placed [here], is a point commented on by the scholars (*mkhas pa dag*). Therefore, now meet with a learned lama and remove any doubts [about it] (*mtha' chod*).<sup>17</sup>

Tentatively interpreted, it means that the Karmapa is acting out the usual humble rhetoric of not considering himself learned, implying that he considers his approach—in the context of this answer—specifically meditation oriented.

In the *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag* (*Great Seal Esoteric Precept*), this key point is both briefly defined and combined with advice:<sup>18</sup> the cause of realising the *dharmakāya* is the ultimate *dharmadhātu* awareness (*ye shes*), undefiled by all stains of dualistic fixation, happiness, suffering, *saṃsāra*, and *nirvāṇa*. This unfabricated natural state is one's own mind, also termed timeless *dharmakāya*, ordinary mind, and inseparability of clarity and emptiness. Co-emergent with its nature it possesses the aspect of not seeing the *dharmakāya* clearly, taking hold of the undefiled nature. What blocks realisation are conceptualisations of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, permanence and nihilism, subject and object. This is 'not knowing' (Skt. *avidyā*).<sup>19</sup>

Now, not being affected (*bcos*) or stirred up through this very conceptualisation of subject and object, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, permanence and nihilism, [you] settle [the mind] in an unfabricated and non-artificial manner into the essence, which is the ordinary mind; freedom from all veils, concepts, and fabrications (*sgrib rtog spros pa*). Through that, the illusions of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* [which come about] through good and bad thoughts (*sems rtog*), the two veils, are liberated in their own place (*rang sar grol*). [This is] the

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*manāg api // Tib. phyi nas de nyid yang dag bshad/ nram dag ye shes gzugs can dang/ 'khor ba dang ni mya ngan 'das/ khyad par cung zad yod ma yin* and the last two of II.iv.32 (*evam eva tu saṃsāram nirvāṇam evam eva tu / saṃsārād r̥te nānyan nirvāṇam iti kathyate // Tib. 'di ni 'khor ba zhes bya ste/ 'di ni mya ngan 'das pa nyid/ 'khor ba spangs nas gzhan du ni/ mya ngan 'das pa rtogs mi 'gyur/*).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. fol. 2b (p. 268): *kho bo'ang nram rtog chos skur 'dod kyang khyod kyis bkod pa'i lung dang 'thad pa de dag gi nram rtog chos skur sgrub pa* [fol. 3a/ p. 269] *ni mkhas pa dag gis khrel ba'i gnas yin pas/ bla ma mkhas pa'i mdun du da dung legs par gtugs la mtha' chod par gyis shig ces karma pas smras pa'o.*

<sup>18</sup> The passage, called *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag*, is found in the collection *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma'i lam la dga' ba'i slob ma la gdams pa*, fol. 8a–9a (p. 579–581). The forty folio long collection consists of thirty-six short instructions (sometimes bearing a particular title). In the *dKar chag*, where the texts are listed separately, it is titled: *Phyag rgya chen po man ngag tu gdams pa* (*dKar chag*, fol. 6a/p. 10).

<sup>19</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje*, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma'i lam la dga' ba'i slob ma gdams pa*, fol. 8b (p. 580).

accumulation of ultimate awareness (*ye shes kyi tshogs*), and [that] causes one to obtain the result, the *dharmakāya*.<sup>20</sup>

Although explained in a more or less scholarly manner, comprehending conceptualisation as in essence *dharmakāya* could be identified as a central theme across different genres, certainly bearing similarity to sGam po pa's material.<sup>21</sup> The practitioner is warned that this advice in itself is a designation. In one answer, the scholastic approach to it is reserved for removing doubts and—rather than being an ontological end in itself—serves the purpose of instilling confidence for the meditation that settles the mind in an ineffable experience.

### 6.3 Common Strands and Divergent Interpretations

Having identified one key element, the Eighth Karmapa's distinctions of the Great Seal into tantric and non-tantric are now briefly reconsidered. In his Madhyamaka commentary, the Eighth Karmapa reasons that this meditational theory and practice (*lta sgom*) of the Great Seal is so significant because it is *the* effective antidote to subtle clinging and conceptualisation in meditation. It would be indeed important for removing latent tendencies of fabrication (*prapañcānuśaya*) and badness (*dauṣṭulya*), when the experience of the gnosis of bliss and emptiness in tantric meditation appears. As such, it is taught because it removes all veils like the 'single white sufficient remedy' (*dkar po gcig thub*).<sup>22</sup>

When practising the mantra system, there would be the danger that the symbolic and actual (*dpe don*) ultimate awareness (*jñāna*) of the third and fourth empowerments, would not be able to remove all veils. This reminds one of the points made about the *Kālacakratantra* in the *Answer to Gling drung pa*.<sup>23</sup> The story, employed as apologetic technique, bears similarities to this reply as well: the Karmapa uses the example of Phag mo gru pa, who, studying first with Sa skya Paṇḍita, made the energies enter the central channel and boasted of experiencing the innate joy (*sahajānanda*),

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: *da 'khor 'das rtag chad gzung 'dzin gyi rnam rtag de nyid kyiis ma bcos mi dkrug par tha mal shes pa sgrib rtag spros pa thams cad dang bral ba'i ngo bo la so ma ma bcos par bzhas pas/ sems rtag pa bzang ngan gyis/ 'khor 'das kyi 'phrul pa ste sgrib gnyis rang sar grol ba ni ye shes kyi tshogs te 'bras bu chos sku thob par byed.*

<sup>21</sup> Sherpa (2004: 188–293).

<sup>22</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 6b (p. 12).

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Five (5.3.1–5.3.4). See also Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung*, fol. 45aff. (p. 555 ff.).

the path of seeing. This still incomplete experience of the fourth empowerment was, then, enhanced upon receiving pith instructions from sGam po pa.<sup>24</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa then notes with Sahajavajra's *Tattvadaśaka*-commentary (as summarised by 'Gos Lo tsā ba) that this path is 'essentially Pāramitā[naya], being in accordance with Mantra[naya] and being called Mahāmudrā'.<sup>25</sup> The experiential instructions of this system are also given without tantric empowerment. This Great Seal system would implicitly teach the ordinary and extraordinary Buddha nature of both sūtra and tantra, wherefore the *Ratnagotravibhāga* was emphasised by sGam po pa, Phag mo gru pa, and 'Bri gung 'Jig rten gsum dgon.<sup>26</sup>

'True nature Great Seal' (*gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po*), and the Great Seal of bliss and emptiness, were differentiated but equal in value. It would not be right to distinguish sūtra and tantra and consider the sūtra-approach superior:

Therefore, though according to the Mantra there does not exist a Great Seal instruction aside (*zur du*) from Nāropa's six doctrines, the lineage masters, having seen the empowerment of meaning (*don gyi dbang gzigs nas*), distinguished (*so sor mdzad*) instructions called 'six doctrines' and 'Great Seal'.<sup>27</sup>

This means he allows the possibility of teaching the Great Seal directly, without tantric empowerment, though he admits that the term stems from the tantras. The approach of sGam po pa as derived from Maitrīpa (here subsumed under practices focusing on sūtra-Madhyamaka) is then distinguished from the sūtra-based Great Seal from Atiśa. In an instruction on the

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. fol. 7a (p. 13). The story of Phag mo gru pa meeting sGam po pa is told also in Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po sgros 'bum*, fol. 181a (p. 361). Furthermore, the Karmapa uses the *Phag mo gru pa'i zhus lan* (which is found in the *Dwags po bka' 'bum*) on the meeting of sGam po pa and Phag mo gru pa (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po sgros 'bum*, fol. 184b/p. 368).

<sup>25</sup> This 'quote' does not express the actual text but is a condensation of it by 'Gos Lo tsā ba from his *Ratnagotravibhāga*-commentary as shown by Mathes (2006: 202, n. 4); see also 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal, *Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma*. Nevertheless, the examination of the actual text by Mathes has proven that Sahajavajra indeed uses the term Great Seal for describing the pith instructions (ibid. and *Tattvadaśakaṭīka* 190a).

<sup>26</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 8a (p. 16).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.: *des na brgyud pa 'di pa dag sngags lugs ltar na chos drug las gzhan phyag chen gyi khrid zur du med kyang don gyi dbang 'di gzigs nas chos drug dang phyag chen zhes khrid so sor mdzad do*. Ruegg (1988: 1261, n. 52) has noted two textual variants: whereas the 1969 edition reads 'previous tradition' (*sngar lugs*), both the 1975 (and the 2004 *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa* used here) have 'mantra tradition' (*sngags lugs*).

Great Seal of rGyal ba Yang dgon pa, the Eighth Karmapa explains that the common (*thun mong*) instruction from Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa* would be known as the 'innate union' (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) of dGe bshes sTon chen and sGe bshes dGon pa ba. He remarks, almost ironically, that sGam po pa and Phag mo gru pa had merely given such teachings the name 'Great Seal of innate union' for those disciples of the dark age who find pleasure in 'the highest', or 'high' (*mtsho mtsho*) vehicle.<sup>28</sup>

In the Madhyamaka commentary, the Karmapa also mentions the transmission of Atiśa, noting that it is the same in purport but rests more on wisdom based on conceptual analysis, whereas in Maitrīpa's system one finds out that the analysing knowledge itself is without root and base (*gzhi med rtsa bral*). As such, Atiśa's system contains the danger of deviating from emptiness (*shor sa*).<sup>29</sup>

The danger of deviating from emptiness recurs in various minor Great Seal commentaries; as does the connected argument that Great Seal is the effective antidote to clinging.<sup>30</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje quotes Mi la ras pa,

<sup>28</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *rGyal ba yang dgon pa'i ngo sprod bdun ma'i khrid yig*, fol. 1b (p. 560): *snnyigs ma'i gdul bya theg pa mtho mtho ma la dga' ba'i ngor*. Sherpa (2004: 174–176) has suggested on the basis of sGam po pa's writings to differentiate the Great Seal methods taught by sGam po pa: (i) 'metonymic' publicly taught 'Great Seal' *lhan cig skyes sbyor* teachings which 'designate a cause by naming its result' (ibid. 170) and mainly derive from the bKa' gdams pa. (ii) The actual Great Seal pith instructions transmitted by Maitrīpa (see ibid. 169–173). This seems to have parallels in the Indian material of Sahajavajra's *Tattvadaśakaṭikā*, which clearly distinguishes the 'practice of realising *mahāmudrā* on the basis of pith-instructions from both Pāramitā- and Mantrayāna' (Mathes 2006: 221).

<sup>29</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 9a f. (p. 17f.); see also Brunnhölzl (2004: 58) and Ruegg (1984: 1263). Again, a story is told: sGam po pa, having previously studied with the bKa' gdams pa masters, had risked still being fettered by this kind of meditation; only on meeting Mi la ras pa did he overcome these 'golden chains'. In a later passage, the Karmapa distinguishes the luminosity (*'od gsal*) as taught in the sūtras from the one in the tantras, which are—though having a common purport—distinguished by its means (*Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 30a ff./p. 56ff). The commentary continues to argue that Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* professes only the *rang stong* view. See Williams (1983a) and Brunnhölzl (2004: 553–597), for the Eighth Karmapa's difference to Tshong kha pa's Madhyamaka and the Eighth Karmapa's concern for Madhyamaka being an effective antidote to mental fixation (*prapañca*) and a means to liberation. For a translation of part of the sixth chapter, see Mikyö Dorje (2006).

<sup>30</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Glo bur gyi dri ma*, is concerned with explaining the correct understanding and cultivation of the ordinary mind. This text contains more interesting definitions (in part using terminology from both the *pramāṇa* and *phar phyin* treatises) and debates that cannot fully be presented here. It was requested by the scribe Bod pa rgya bo and was written by the Karmapa in Kong stod 'or shod. The text is found in the *dKar chag* (fol. 9a/p. 17) of the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa but not in the title list of the Eighth

commenting on his advice to avoid the 'three delaying diversions' (*gol sa gsum*), relating to experiences from *śamatha* and the 'four occasions for straying' (*shor sa bzhi*) into a wrong understanding of *śūnyatā*, where he mentions the mantra methods.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, in the Eighth Karmapa's answer to a question about Great Seal by a Bla ma sNe ring pa, the Karmapa defines the Great Seal as tantric, perfectly in line with Sa skya Paṇḍita: the way of progressing through the stages and paths (*sa lam bgrod tshul*) would consist of untying the blocks in the subtle energy system of the right and left channel, melting them into the central channel, and thereupon traversing the five path and twelve *bhūmi*. The result would be actualised in being brought to maturity through the four empowerments, practising the two stages of tantric meditation, and applying the inner and outer Seals and three types of 'innate conduct' (*lhan cig spyod pa*).<sup>32</sup>

In temporary summary with regard to Chapter Five and also Chapter Six—though at this stage of research a final statement would be premature—the strands presented here allow the deduction of some striking characteristics and contradictions. The Karmapa continues blending the sūtra and tantra, like Maitrīpa, by emphasising the term *amanasikāra-madhyamaka*. In that context, he stressed the primary importance of the line, Saraha, Maitrīpa, sGam po pa, and the Third Karmapa. The Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal contains key elements found in the works of sGam po pa and the Indian siddhas: the removal of any clinging to experiences of empowerments or emptiness, and, connected to it, the teaching of conceptualisation as *dharmakāya*.

The Karmapa admits Great Seal practice which focuses on sūtra-Madhyamaka, as sGam po pa's emphasis. But he differentiates this Great Seal of sGam po pa from Atiśa's system which was called 'Great Seal' for pedagogical purpose. Though in his *Madhyamakāvatāra* commentary the Eighth Karmapa is at times opposed to considering sūtra Great Seal in any

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Karmapa in *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*. It could therefore have been composed after 1546.

<sup>31</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Glo bur gyi dri ma*, fol. 3a (p. 1077). For the *gol sa* and *shor sa*, see also Namgyal (1986: 293–313) and Jackson, D. (1994: 181–85), who translates Sa skya Paṇḍita's criticism in the *Thubs pa'i dgongs gsal* which maintains that precisely this teaching is not from the Buddha. As a strategy in the *Glo bur gyi dri ma*, Mi bskyod rdo rje refers Sa skya Paṇḍita's critique from the *sDom gsum rab dbye* (*blun po'i phyag rgya chen sgom pa phal cher dud 'gro'i gnas su skye*) to the wrong understanding of *śamatha*, which pertains to the *gol sa*.

<sup>32</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Ne ring 'phags pa'i dris lan*, fol. 1b (p. 322).

way superior to the tantric, in the reply to Gling drung pa (Chapter Five) the Karmapa taught the Great Seal as being neither sūtra nor tantra.

Moreover there seems to be an essential instruction, an 'essence Great Seal', to be applied, which is not clearly categorised but is the key for overcoming clinging and conceptualisation. One may see here some similarity to the Eighth Karmapa's contemporary, bKra shis rnam rgyal. bKra shis rnam rgyal, quoting the Indian siddha Saraha and sGam po pa, considers Great Seal an independent path which can nevertheless be linked to tantra. It would even be acceptable to connect it to the sūtras and tantras as benefit appears for many.<sup>33</sup> This interpretation, in accordance with the nineteenth century scholar bKra shis chos 'phel, highlights the pedagogical nature of the Great Seal systems.<sup>34</sup>

As the reply to Gling drung pa (like most of the instructions) was taught in a specific context, the textual evidence is still too thin to read the Karmapa's final view into it—if there is one. That its classification of the tantras into mundane and supramundane was found elsewhere, lends some credibility to this source's assertions. Its direction would also fit with the Karmapa's purported emphasis of the *dohā*, which figures also among one of the three basic distinctions outlined above. But in other works the Great Seal was defined as clearly and only tantric.

As one needs to remember that the adaption of teaching the Great Seal, in one way or another, largely depends on the guru-disciple interaction, one may refer to it as a perspective that allows for explaining such doctrinal variegations. The teacher or guru, under whose close guidance the Great Seal is to be taught, may in fact permeate most of the Great Seal approaches as both origin and means. It is therefore surprising that—apart from some early, rather unbalanced, classifications as 'Lamaism'—the soteriological significance of the teacher in the Great Seal traditions has been given comparatively little explicit attention in academic circles.<sup>35</sup> Yet, investigat-

<sup>33</sup> Namgyal (1986: 110–112). This is found in the subsection on identifying the essence as path in the section which describes how the Great Seal embodies the deep meaning of both the sūtras and the tantras. The passage in the *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* is on fol. 8b (p. 16). (See also Ruegg 1988: 1261). Jackson, D. (1994: 25, n. 59, n. 60) reads it that Karmapa objected to considering tantric Great Seal in any way inferior. Yet, one may also read that he meant it to be not inferior to the sūtra Great Seal but to the essence Great Seal.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter Two (2.1.1, 2.1.2).

<sup>35</sup> An exception is Sobisch's 'Guru Devotion in the bKa' brgyud pa Tradition: Its Functioning as the Single Mean for the Arising of Realisation' (2011). The importance of the guru has been duly noted (see for example Jackson, R. 2004: 3–53, and notes below). But this thesis wishes to refer to the guru-devotion as a perspective for academic research on the Great Seal that allows for better explaining doctrinal variegations and raises questions about the

ing the guru's role is a research-focus next to the 'doctrinal route' that supports understanding the Great Seal as a pragmatic heuristic.

#### 6.4 *The Guru as Origin and Example in Vajrayāna and Great Seal Traditions*

The guru is a common element in further 'mystic traditions' ranging from Christianity to Sūfism and the Indian religions.<sup>36</sup> According to the Buddhist Tantras, the divine became immanent with the Vajrayāna, where the guru was seen as the actual embodiment of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The chosen personal teacher is the source of empowerment and instruction and cannot be compromised;<sup>37</sup> importance of the teacher can thus be considered a unifying element in the Tibetan Vajrayāna-traditions.<sup>38</sup>

The guru further takes *the* prominent role of introducing the student into the innate in the siddhas' songs, or the textual sources centring on *sahaja*<sup>39</sup>, which are cited as origins of non-tantric Great Seal.<sup>40</sup> The bKa' brgyud pa

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often missing logical argument behind the guru's importance. For Lamaism, see Lopez (1997).

<sup>36</sup> Moore (1978: 41); for the yogi in Indian traditions, see also the essays collected in Werner (1989); for mysticism in the discourses of the Buddha, see Harvey (1989). This section does not wish to discuss the intricacies of comparative mysticism but rather point to some striking themes in the Great Seal traditions. For understanding such aspects of religious experience, see, for example, Sharf (1996).

<sup>37</sup> See Snellgrove (1987: 176–180) who quotes *Guhyasamājatantra*, for the teacher in the Buddhist tantras; Brook (1990: 71) considers the guru as one of several elements typical for Tantrism, as does Padoux (2000: 42–45). For definitions of Tantra, see Padoux (2002) and White (2000, 2005). See also the 'Celebration of the Guru' as common elements of the siddhas' songs in the introduction of Jackson, R. (2004: 3–53).

<sup>38</sup> For the bKa' brgyud traditions, see, for example, the famed short invocation of Vajradhara: 'Devotion is said to be the head of meditation. A meditator constantly calls upon his lama as he is the one who opens the door to the treasury of profound instructions. Grant me your blessing so that non-artificial devotion may be born [within me]!' (dBang phyug rdo rje Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i phreng ba*, p. 117: *mos gus sgom gyi ngo bor gsungs pa bzhin/ /man ngag gter sgo 'byed pa'i bla ma la/ /rgyun du gsol ba 'debs pa'i sgom chen la/ /bcos min mos gus skye bar byin gyis rlobs/*).

<sup>39</sup> See also Kvaerne 1977: 61–64, for a brief discussion of the term *sahaja*.

<sup>40</sup> Abhayadattaśrī, *Grub chen brgyad cu*, 172 (song of Tantipa), translated by Kapstein (2006a: 55). See also Tillipā's *Dohākoṣa* 6 (Jackson, R. 2004; see also ed. and trans. Bhayani 1998: 14). Saraha's songs portray the guru as someone who 'has done with karma' (*las zin pa yi skyes bu*) and at whose feet one should gain certainty about the nature of one's own mind: *Dohākoṣa* 43a (Jackson, R. 2004): *kye lags dbang po ltos shig dang / 'di las ngas ni ma gtogs (Advayavajra reads: mi rtogs) so / las zin pa yi skyes bu yi/ drung du sems thag gcad par byos* (see also Scherer 2007). See also Jackson, R. (2004: 3–53).

Great Seal preliminaries usually contain a meditation on the teacher, which is, at times, considered the actual practice.<sup>41</sup> sGam po pa has stated:

It (Buddhahood) is acquired through the blessing of the guru, from one's own reverence and devotion, and by the power of meditatively cultivating through diligent effort, whereas otherwise it will not be acquired.<sup>42</sup>

The Eighth Karmapa is no exception in suggesting the teacher's significance. He, for example, explains that there is no more supreme 'reincarnate [lama]' (*sprul sku*) than the vajra-master, who transmits the liberating and ripening (*smin grol*) empowerments and instructions. The meditation of those who do not truly discern the practice (*gdar sha gcod*) with the help of a supreme teacher, but instead practise not liberating their mind but pretending (*ltar 'chos*) greatness in the Great Seal, is likened to 'ascetic practice of pigs and dogs'.<sup>43</sup> The bad teacher is as dangerous to spiritual development as the authentic one is beneficial; pretence of spiritual development is regarded as a main transgression.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the Karmapa notes that false teachers abound<sup>45</sup> and complains about lamas these days, 'who give up a bit of drinking and start talking about accomplishment'.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The Ninth Karmapa argues: '[The meditation on the teacher] is referred to as a "preliminary", however, it determines whether meditation takes place or not, since it is actually the main practice' (dBang phyug rdo rje, *Phyag chen nges don rgya mtsho*, fol. 48b: *de ni sngon 'gro ming btags kyang dngos gzhi rang yin pas sgom skye mi skye 'di la rag las so*.) For the various Great Seal preliminaries see dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i 'phreng ba*; Namgyal (1986: 132–138); bKra shis rnam rgyal, *sNgon 'gro khrid yig thun bzhi'i rnal 'byor du bya ba*. See also the seventeenth-century work Ngag dbang bsTan pa'i nyi ma, *Phyag chen khrid yig* and the modern 'Bri gung Lam mkhyen rgyal po Rin po che, *Phyag rgya chen po lnga ldan gyi sngon 'gro'i khrid*. In the fivefold Great Seal of the 'Bri gung pa, the teacher is also one of the five elements of practice (Sobisch 2003a). For the importance of the teacher in sGam po pa's Great Seal, see Sherpa (2004: 93), Jackson, D. (1994: 150), and Kragh (1998: 12–26); see also Namgyal (1986: 112).

<sup>42</sup> sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen, *rJe phag mo gru pa'i zhu las* (translation and Tibetan text in Jackson, D. 1994: 150–151).

<sup>43</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, fol. 6a (p. 745).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. The text paints drastic consequences for those pretenders, who are prone to find themselves in the hellish states of existence (*naraka*).

<sup>45</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 17b (p. 148). It was noted before, that the slightly tense political climate coincided with lamentations of spiritual degeneration, a theme which was also popular in the much later nineteenth century vivid descriptions of Dza dPal sprul (Patrul Rinpoche 1994: 102–103; *sNying thig sngon 'gro'i khrid yig*). 'Blind faith' is thus not recommended, nor receiving the four empowerments, nor meditating on the teacher without having examined him. See also Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Po to ba'i chig lab ring mo la mi bskyod rdo rje 'grel pa*



Why is the guru so important? The Great Seal would be a transmission of the meaning (*don brgyud*), and the one communicating its understanding should be called 'the main lama' (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*).<sup>47</sup> Chapter Four outlined the Eighth Karmapa's study and practice of the Great Seal: the transmission of blessing from his single most important teacher, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa.<sup>48</sup> The stories quoted so often, be it about Phag mo gru pa and sGam po pa, Khams pa sbad mchod and Phag mo gru pa, or Mi la ras pa and sGam po pa, in essence revolve around the students and their relationship to a teacher.

The instructions analysed in Chapter Five were either written by the Karmapa or (supposedly) a recorded word. In the dialogues, the great devotion the Karmapa inspired helped the students get closer to the highest insight. Thus, tradition views as origin of Great Seal instructions in both oral and written form the guru, who is legitimised by his transmission.<sup>49</sup> The Karmapa writes in a spiritual memoir that the teacher does not place the liberation in one's hand, but that one should see his qualities and practice like him.<sup>50</sup> In other words, the teacher is origin as well as example.

Philosophical argument for the teacher is rare in the examined material, so natural does appear the primary role.<sup>51</sup> The implicit argument is rather one of transmission and experience; by invoking the authenticity of the lineage (*brgyud pa*), its power or blessing (Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*), and the realisation of the guru.<sup>52</sup>

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*mdzad pa'i bstan bcos*, fol. 73b (p. 70), where the Eighth Karmapa comments on a work by the bKa' gdams pa master Po to ba. The relationship and the question of who is a teacher and who is not is also explained in an instruction the Eighth Karmapa passed on to his fervent sponsors of the sKu rab pa family (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *sKu rab pa'i sde pa khu dbon la bstsal ba'i khrid kyi rim pa*, fol. 8a ff./ pp. 209ff.).

<sup>46</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 1b (p. 958). According to the colophon, this text consists of a note made by some students of the Eighth Karmapa, which they then showed to him for confirmation (ibid. fol. 20b/p. 996).

<sup>47</sup> The Eighth Karmapa defines quoting 'Gos Lo tsā ba in *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, fol. 8a (p. 16).

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter Four (4.1.4). What is more, the first recorded teaching of the Karmapa was the meditation instruction (*zab khrid*) on the guru yoga, imparted in 1513 in Ri bo che (*A khu A khra*, fol. 34b/p. 100).

<sup>49</sup> For example, in a dream vision of Marpa, where he describes meeting the siddha Saraha (Kapstein 2006a: 51–52). The poem is studied in Kapstein (2003: 767–773).

<sup>50</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*, fol. 17b, p. 148.

<sup>51</sup> Roger Jackson has brought up this issue in a keynote speech on Great Seal studies at the *Mahāmudrā* Panel of the Eleventh Conference of the IATS, Bonn, August 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Kragh (2011) has pointed out with the example of the six doctrines of Nāropa, how specific texts were only transmitted due to their authority but not necessarily due to their being used

## 6.5 *The Guru as Means in the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal Instructions*

This section turns to the teacher's role not only as origin or example but as means and goal of realisation in the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal instructions that do not explicitly entail the tantric path of means.<sup>53</sup>

*Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid* (*Meditation Instruction for the Kaṃ tshang Great Seal Practice*) explains the different paths for the different capacities, remarking that if a student endowed with 'fortunate residues' (*skal ldan*) meets a guru of the Dwags po tradition, not much elaboration is needed. On the basis of the deep wish to let go of attachment to cyclical existence (*nges 'byung*) and harmful actions, 'opening up' or 'invoking' (*gsol 'debs*) is considered essential, since the realisation of all paths only emerges from the three jewels and the lama. Through fierce invocation (*gsol ba phur tshugs su btab pa*), one could not avoid accomplishing *śamatha*, *vipaśyanā*, and the timeless awareness (*ye shes*) of the Great Seal.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, the idea of invocation, or opening up, is both vital entrance to practice and a form of training. The Karmapa then defines *gsol 'debs*: apart from eating, drinking, and sleeping, the practitioner's body (through attending the lama), speech (through pronouncing the qualities of

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in practice. Davidson has argued that, in Tibet, the translator and his (sometimes self-styled) instructions (*gdams ngag*) constitute an important point of Tibetan tantric lineages, as do the clans for its transmission (Davidson 2004: 149–151).

<sup>53</sup> An important stanza for guru-devotion among the bKa' brgyud pa traditions is *Hevajratāntra* I.viii.36 (especially the third line): 'That which is not expressed by others, the inborn; which cannot be found anywhere; is to be known through ...[a special kind of]... guru attendance; and through one's own merit' (translation by Sobisch 2011, who treats in detail the variant problematic readings and 'Jig rten dgon po's interpretation of *dus mtha'* (Skt. *parva*) as the final moment of attending the guru as *dharmakāya*). See also David Jackson's translation of the same verse and its context in sGam po pa's *rJe Phag mo gru pa's zhu lan* (Jackson, D. 1994: 150–152).

<sup>54</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 3b (p. 962). It is difficult to accurately translate the meaning of *gsol 'debs*. When it is used with an object following in the later part of the sentence, it can convey something like 'please' or 'I ask of you' ('please grant me innate gnosis/timeless awareness of the innate': *gsol ba 'debs so lhan skyes ye shes stsol*). Where it is used without an object following, 'to invoke' or 'open up' can convey the state to be achieved in phrases such as 'all beings open up to the precious lama': *sems can thams cad bla ma rin po che la gsol ba 'debs* (both examples from the guru-yoga in dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX (et. al.), *sGrub brgyud rin po che'i 'phreng ba*, p. 117). 'To pray' would be an alternative, but 'prayer' often carries implicit assumptions regarding the nature of religion (Gomez 2000: 1037). For the so-called 'Christian phase' in translating Buddhism, see Doboom (2001: 2f.).

the lama), and mind (contemplating only the manifold qualities), should be constantly focused on the teacher as opposed to invoking the teacher at set times and occasions only.<sup>55</sup> In an interlinear remark (*mchan*) a formal *guru-yoga* is outlined.<sup>56</sup>

The text continues with a description of the main body of practice (*dn̄gos bzhi*), which consists of the practices of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* meditation.<sup>57</sup> Again, the particular method of calm abiding and insight meditation of the Dwags po tradition is connected to contemplating one's teacher; after an outline of calm abiding practice, the Karmapa continues: 'in the tradition of the system of the bKa' brgyud doctor from Dwags po, which expounds all words [of the Buddha] (*bka'*) as an instructional precept (*gdams ngag*)'<sup>58</sup>, one would sit in the seven-fold meditational posture, evoke the teacher as the Buddha Vajradhara, and fervently open up to him (*gsol 'debs*). *gsol 'debs* incites the state of devotion or openness (*mos gus*), which in turn acts as a means to let the mind rest one-pointedly on the wholesome (*dge ba*): a facilitator to calm the mind and experience the three qualities connected with it: clarity (*gsal ba*), joy (*bde ba*), and non-conceptuality (*rnam rtog med pa*).<sup>59</sup>

The teacher re-surfaces in the ensuing discussion on different objections to the bKa' brgyud method, where the Karmapa emphasises that in this tradition one should not over-analyse conventionally.<sup>60</sup> Instead, one should rest the mind in a way that is suitable for the Great Seal ultimate awareness to arise. How? By invoking (*gsol 'debs*) an authentic teacher, who is the essence of all Buddhas, and having his blessing affecting or entering

<sup>55</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 3b (p. 962).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. One visualises the Buddha Vajradhara, being one with the First Karmapa and the root lama, e.g. the Eighth Karmapa. After a seven branch training (*yan lag bdun*), the guru dissolves in to a Great Seal *bindu* and then melts with oneself.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. fol. 4b (p. 964).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. fol. 5a (p. 965): *bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje'i lugs kyis bka' thams cad gdams ngag tu 'chad pa'i* [fol. 5b/p. 966] *srol la/*.

<sup>59</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 5a (p. 965). The work discusses these states and how they are connected to the sixth consciousness (*drug pa yid kyi rnam par shes pa*) in more detail. As this section analyses the roles of the teacher, the subtleties of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* meditation are not discussed here in detail. A similar outline is found at a later stage of the work (ibid. fol. 8b/p. 972).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. fol. 6b (p. 968). An interlinear comment strikes one as similar to the *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, where the Karmapa is generally opposed to the reification of further *prapañca* through building a philosophical edifice (Brunnhölzl 2004: 555; Williams 1983a: 125).

(*bzhugs*) one's mind.<sup>61</sup> He then relates it to sGam po pa's three paths: (i) the one of analysis (*dpvod pa*), (ii) the one of direct cognition (*dnogon sum*), and (iii) the one of blessing (*byin rlabs*). Here the path of blessing is not equated with the Vajrayāna (as it is at times done in sGam po pa's writings), but with 'the tradition of this transmission' (*brgyud pa 'di'i lugs*).<sup>62</sup>

The work continues to explain both calm *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* meditation across ten folios; the details of which cannot be expounded here.<sup>63</sup> Again, the lama is employed as a means, while cultivating *samadhi* or profound absorption and the three ensuing qualities of joy (*bde ba*), clarity (*gsal ba*), and non-conceptuality (*mi rtog pa*); making the face (*zhal*) of the lama an object of mind is considered a skilful means for one-pointedness (*rtse gcig*) in this bKa' brgyud lineage.<sup>64</sup>

*Vipaśyanā* is at first introduced with the depictions of essencelessness (Tib. *bdag med*, Skt. *anātman*). After some discussions, the Karmapa argues for a particular way of insight meditation, which is summarised as '... [one] needs to settle the immediate mind (*de ma thag yid*) on all aspects of the mental formation (Skt. *saṃskāra*, Tib. *'du byed*) of the eight groups of consciousness.'<sup>65</sup> In other words, 'immediate', meaning also 'moment' and 'settle', is defined as 'apprehending' (*'dzin pa*), an approach attributed to sGam po pa and the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 6b (p. 968).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. This is certainly a very interesting point, which supports Sobisch's research on 'Jig rten don po's understanding of guru devotion as the single means to enlightenment (Sobisch 2011). The interlinear comment of the Eighth Karmapa here reserves this path to the individual with fortunate propensities (*skal ldan*) who, upon having the nature of mind directly pointed out (by a teacher), realises enlightenment. This would be the famed 'sudden' (*cig car*) approach (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 6b/p. 968). For sGam po pa's three paths, see Chapter Two (2.1.2); see also Sherpa (2004: 129–36), Kragh (1998: 29–39), and Mathes (2006: 2).

<sup>63</sup> The discussions of insight meditation, presented in this brief but informative source, are themselves of considerable interest for the doctrinal aspects of Great Seal teaching. What concerns this section here, however, is the role of the teacher.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. fol. 8b (p. 972). Making 'blind faith' (*rmongs dad*) its cause, however, is not considered correct (*mchog*).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. fol. 17a (p. 988).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. The interlinear comment specifies this as the intention of the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, as the defining characteristic (*rang gi mtshan nyid*) of whatever consciousness (*shes pa*) is apprehended. The text asserts the indispensability for understanding this subtle point because, on the basis of it, the ignorance about the ultimate awareness of the Great Seal is removed. After more descriptions of how the levels (*bhūmi*) of the bodhisattvas are realised, this approach is once more ascribed to sGam po pa and the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (ibid. fol. 20a/p. 995). The wording may likely refer to

The function of devotion (*mos gus*) in this work is an intense state of mind which is both a prerequisite of, and also a part of, the actual practice.<sup>67</sup> Connected or enhanced by the practice of *gsol 'debs*, it can be used to both concentrate the mind as well as to bring it to a state where conceptual states fade and the power (*byin rlabs*) enters the mind stream of the trainee. That does not exclude investigating mind, which the instructions also professes to a great degree, but points to devotion's crucial function next to understanding or insight *prajñā*.<sup>68</sup>

Other instructions indicate a similar usage for 'confidence' (Tib. *dad pa*, Skt. *śraddhā*). The first of seven sessions in the *Phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i zin bris* (*Note of the Prerequisites for Cultivating the Great Seal*)<sup>69</sup> advises:

Above one's head, on a lotus and moon[-disc], [one visualises] the Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje, having a black crown in a garuḍa wing [form] and with golden radiance, endowed with the three dharma robes. Then one does one-pointed prayer through the [praise entitled] *sKu bstod zla med ma*.<sup>70</sup>

Session two defines the 'three kinds of confidence' (*dad pa gsum*) as centring on the teacher, deviating from the more standard description in sGam po pa's *Thar rgyan*.<sup>71</sup>

Rang byung rdo rje's *rNam shes ye shes 'byed pa'i bstan bcos* (see also the paraphrase by Sheehey 2005). The work concludes with an invocation of the transmission lineage of the Great Seal lamas from Vajradhara via Saraha to Sangs rgyas mnyan pa and the Eighth Karmapa. Thereby, it places the instructions in the continuity of the precepts passed from teacher to student (ibid. fol. 20b/p. 996).

<sup>67</sup> Other instructions directly make *mos gus* the central theme: Apart from the *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, there are titles clearly indicating *mos gus* as the main factor. For example the *Mos gus phyag chen gyi khrid zab mo rgyal ba rgod tshang pa'i lugs*, the *Mos gus bdun ma'i khrid yig gzhung 'grel ba dang bcas pa* (esp. fol. 31 a/p. 795), and the *Mos gus chen mo'i khrid* (*Kaṃ tshang*, p. 364) which remains unidentified (all authored by the Eighth Karmapa).

<sup>68</sup> Analysis of the absence of self is carried out in for example Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Kaṃ tshang phyag chen nyams len gyi khrid*, fol. 11a–13a/pp. 977–981).

<sup>69</sup> This text again consists of a note (*zin bris*) of the Eighth Karmapa's teaching made by his student Bya bral Ratnanātha, who then later showed it to the Karmapa for confirmation (Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i zin bris*, fol. 3b/p. 275).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. fol. 1b (p. 272): *lde'ang phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i dmigs thun dang po ni/ rang gi spyi bor pad zla'i steng du rgyal ba karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje zhwa nag khyung gshog gser mdangs can chos gos nmam pa gsum ldan du gsal btob nas sku bstod zla med ma'i sgo nas gsol 'debs rtse gcig tu byed pa'ol*.

<sup>71</sup> For a slightly diverging definition popular in the bKa' brgyud lineage, see sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen, *Dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*, pp. 214–219. D. Jackson has observed that also graded teaching works of sGam po pa and Phag mo gru pa

2. Then, increasing the longing towards that very [lama] (*de nyid*), one mainly strives to accomplish the very trust of wishing; [and] while [doing so], the trust of conviction, [namely] to consider whatever [the lama] says true and valid,<sup>72</sup> comes about. And then, as the trust arises, where the two obscurations of one's mind become removed, one settles on that (*de*) one-pointedly.<sup>73</sup>

Here, confidence culminates in a state free from obscurations. This suggests that *dad pa* is not only prerequisite but also actual meditation, though the object in Great Seal practice is the guru rather than the teachings or the Buddha in more general terms.<sup>74</sup>

Additionally, it is vital to mention the practices or instructions, which are either explicitly designed as a meditation on the teacher (*guru-yoga*) or come very close to such practices, indicated by their content. One of the Eighth Karmapa's instructions exemplifies a guidebook for meditation that passes on essential instructions for advancing one's contemplation.<sup>75</sup>

start out with the notion of confidence or trust (*dad pa*) as prerequisite, as do the 'three [levels] of appearance' (*snang ba gsum*) meditation manuals of the Sa skya pa (Jackson, D. 1994: 233; 242, n. 24).

<sup>72</sup> One may add a second '*dzin pa* for *tshad ma* here, or interpret the passage in a different way: from the *bden* '*dzin* comes the understanding of *tshad ma*, 'considering whatever [the lama] says as true, [he is] authentic/valid.'

<sup>73</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la nye bar mkho ba'i zin bris*, fol. 1b (p. 272): 2 /*de nas de nyid la 'dun pa cher btang ste 'dod pa'i dad pa nyid gtso bor sgrub pa la yid ches pa'i dad pa ci gsungs la bden 'dzin tshad ma skyes shing/ de nas rang rgyud kyi sgrib gnyis dwangs* [fol. 2a/p. 273] *pa'i dad pa 'byung bas de la rtse gcig tu 'jog pa'ol*.

<sup>74</sup> In different Buddhist traditions, confidence (Skt. *śraddhā*, Pāli: *saddhā*) sometimes translated 'faith', has a range of meanings and is not to be confused with the theological concept of belief. The idea of confidence as practice is not confined to the Great Seal traditions, though the main focus is not usually the guru in other contexts. Brassard (2000: 98–99) has argued that in Mahāyāna context of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, beyond mere preliminary value, *śraddhā* can be considered a practice itself. It is sometimes glossed as 'trust or reliance on someone else' (*parapratyaya*), further connotations are often subsumed under *prasāda* or the *prasannacitta*, which evokes the meaning of calm and serenity as well as conviction and trust (Gomez 2004: 278). In the sūtras, it is found among the 'five faculties' (*indriya* or *bala*) conducive to good practice or, in more scholastic works, among the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment (ibid.; Gimello 2004: 51). These are positive states of mind (*kuśala*), which often have the connotation of active engagement in practice, overcoming sluggishness and doubt (also expressed with the word *adhimukti* or *adhimokṣa*), and gaining the ability to trust or rely upon something (*Abhidharmakośa* VI. 29).

<sup>75</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *mNyams med dags* [sic!] *po bka' brgyud kyi gdam* [sic!] *pa'i srogi* [abbrv. for *srog gi*] *yang snying*, NGMPP, Reel no. E 12794/6, 9 fols, manuscript, *dbu med*, partly written in '*khyug yig* (*Heart Essence of the Life Force of the Instructions of the Uncomparable Dwags po bKa' brgyud*). It found entry into the Eighth Karmapa's title list from 1546 (*Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, fol. 8a/p. 365), and the colophon clearly indicates the Eighth Karmapa's authorship.

It contains condensed, and at times cryptic, advice for seven meditation sessions; ranging from *guru-yoga* and control of inner energies, to contemplations of loving-kindness and compassion.<sup>76</sup> But this 'heart-essence of instructions' clearly puts all practices into the framework of 'becoming' the teacher (presumably in its ultimate and metaphorical sense). It starts with the words: 'further, those wishing to accomplish me myself',<sup>77</sup> and closes with: 'Those who wish to realise the state of me, Mi bskyod rdo rje, in one life and one body, should strive to accomplish what was taught [here] in this way.'<sup>78</sup>

Emulating the teacher is thus the fundamental goal of the path; and in that, the work is similar to the Eighth Karmapa's famed *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal 'byor*, which starts with: 'Now, those, who think only of me, Mi bskyod rdo rje ...'.<sup>79</sup> This typical blend of oral and written transmission extends to the point where the text comes to life in meditation and could be termed 'the teacher as text'. Another *guru-yoga* instruction concludes with the remark that unless *mos gus* is stable, methods to increase trust (*dad pa*) towards the teacher should be applied.<sup>80</sup> This suggests *mos gus* also functions as goal.

On the whole, the concept of *dad pa*, or confidence towards the teacher, and the ensuing practices of *mos gus* and *gsol 'debs*, are a central pillar of Great Seal as prerequisite, practice, and goal. One may even go so far as to say that devotion to the teacher is the means for realising the Great Seal next to insight. With this emphasis, these particular instances of bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal texts could be termed Vajrayāna, insofar as Vajrayāna has the guru and his transmission as a defining characteristic and insofar the guru is used as means: whether the yogic exercises of the path of means are

<sup>76</sup> Informants from the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition have maintained that this work was designed for advanced practitioners, who had received guidance previously. They would know what certain cryptic lines would mean when doing their meditative practice (oral communication, Ma ni ba Shes rab rgyal mtshan Rin po che, July 2007; oral communication mKhan po Nges don, December 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *mNyams med dags po bka' brgyud*, fol. 1b: *de yang kho* (= *kho bo*) *rang sgrub par 'dod pa rnams*/.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. fol. 9a: *zhes bya ba 'di ni kho bo mi bskyod rdo rje'i go 'phang tshe cig lus cig gi grub par 'dod pa rnams kyi* (emend to *kyis*?) *'di bzhin sgrub par mdzod cigll*.

<sup>79</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Thun bzhi bla ma'i rnal sbyor*, p. 269: *da ni kho bo mi bskyod rdo rje kho na min pa bsam rgyu med pa kun*.

<sup>80</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Bla ma phyi nang gsang gsum kyi sgrub thabs mos gus gsol 'debs*, fol. 18b (p. 810).

employed or not.<sup>81</sup> This indicates a certain flexibility, suggesting that the doctrine taught rather depends on circumstances.

This chapter has portrayed a threefold basic differentiation of the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal and pictured the conceptualisation as *dharmakāya* instructions as a key doctrine. Further investigating Great Seal categorisations in the instructions of the Eighth Karmapa, it has highlighted some distinct features: how the Karmapa differentiates between sGam po pa's innate union instructions and those passed on from Atiśa and how he uses stories and the rhetoric of removal of clinging for justification. Some question and answer texts define Great Seal as only tantric, some as beyond sūtra and tantra, whereas the Madhyamaka commentary maintains they should not be distinguished in purport.

Apart from the common strands, these contradictions suggest that at this stage of research it is hard to pin down the 'final' interpretation or hierarchy of the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal. As it seems intrinsic to the study of Great Seal texts that it often evades classification, one must ask oneself, whether such a research avenue does full justice to the material. Certainly, attempting to understand and trace doctrinal developments, terms, and their various meanings and contexts, its terminology, doctrinal development, and systematisation is a necessary and important undertaking.<sup>82</sup>

But the doctrinal variegations support the Great Seal's pedagogical significance, in which genre and addressee play more than a secondary role. Viewing these different approaches as pedagogical helps to make sense of these apparent contradictions. As does an investigation of the guru's significance as origin and example. Guru devotion in the Great Seal instructions of the Eighth Karmapa was then shown to be both prerequisite and practice of the Great Seal in not specifically tantric instructions.

In conjunction with the doctrinal flexibility outlined, this supports the suggestion that the Great Seal is not a set of readymade doctrines and practices but rather consists of, and lives in, the dynamic interaction bet-

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<sup>81</sup> Sobisch (2011) has reached similar conclusions by investigating sGam po pa's and 'Jig rten dgon po's works. He has argued that the guru devotion is the single means for the arising of realisation, especially in the final phase, where the guru is understood to be the *dharmakāya*. In the *guru-yoga* the realisation would—though not depending on the path of means—still be understood as tantra.

<sup>82</sup> Jackson, D. (1990b: 59–63) has suggested that researchers trace each doctrine in the context of the Great Seal debates around Sa skya Paṇḍita and the bKa' brgyud pa. As was shown, doctrinal classification and apologetics were carried out extensively in the writings of, among others, the Eighth Karmapa, bKra shis nram rgyal, and 'Brug chen Padma dkar po.



ween teacher and student. The teacher is—true to the Buddhist ideal of the ‘best preacher’—depicted as the one who selects the appropriate method from the ‘ocean of instructions’.<sup>83</sup> The main goal is then to actualise the innate, to find conceptualisation as in essence *dharmakāya*, and come to an experience. Experience and realisation are the ultimate goals that constitute the measure for any method.<sup>84</sup> This pragmatic approach bears similarities to traits of early Buddhism, as pointed out in the famous *Alagaddūpamasutta*.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> For the Buddha as the best preacher, see Deegalle (2006: 21–35).

<sup>84</sup> Realisation is achieved through training in meditative experiences (*mnyam*) and finally resting in the natural state (Martin 1992: 242). Sharf (1995) has—mainly on the basis of Japanese Buddhism—argued that the rhetoric of experience is not based on exact terms and experiences. Gyatso warns not to take this to the extreme (1999: 115f.) and shows that, unlike Japanese Buddhism, Tibetan traditions clearly have written about experience (*nyams myong*). She refers to the Great Seal, Direct Vision branch of the Great Perfection, and the four empowerments of the *niruttara*-tantras.

<sup>85</sup> It compares the Buddha's teaching to a raft: ‘You, O monks, who understand the Teaching's similitude to a raft, you should let go even (good) teachings, how much more false ones!’ *Alagaddūpamasutta* 14 (*Majjhima Nikāya* 22), trans. Ñyānāponika Thera (1974) (see also Scherer 2006b).



## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to explore the Eighth Karmapa's life and writings, analysing how he taught the Great Seal in specific contexts and textual genres.

Through critical evaluation of the content and origins of Tibetan sources contained in the *Collected Works of the Eighth Karmapa*, a solid foundation was laid for this thesis and future research. Specifically, material drawn from three early spiritual biographies was carefully investigated to construct a more complete portrait and analysis of the Eighth Karmapa's life and remedy the shortage of historical research of his period. The Eighth Karmapa can be considered the most significant scholar of the Karmapa lineage besides the Third Karmapa. Yet, crucial to his life were the mystical practices of the Great Seal, the transmission of blessing from Sangs rgyas mnyan pa, apparently taught even without much formal education. The Karmapa has been shown as a talented, at times struggling youth, who exhibited certain humbleness.

Despite, or one might say because of, involvement in Tibetan politics from a young age, inherited from his predecessor, his (and his spiritual biographer's) attitude towards the religio-political climate of the time was not enthusiastic. Appeasement efforts are reported alongside skilfully written letters to rulers and open laments of the degenerate times and lamas. The first half of the sixteenth century emerged as a crucial period. The dBus and gTsang wars, and the dGe lugs and bKa' brgyud political clashes have been related to the founding of two key monasteries near Lhasa. These geo-strategic underpinnings propelled spiritual transmissions into becoming sects, entangled in political affairs. Despite the dGe lugs and bKa' brgyud political tensions and the direct manner of the Karmapa's philosophical argumentations, his broad education, interests, and the events surrounding the composition of his *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and *Madhyamakāvatāra* commentaries suggest caution when reading political agendas into scholastic commentaries, even those of a powerful hierarchy. Nor should one seek to presume exclusively doctrinal reasons for ongoing sectarian tensions.

In future, continued historical studies of the Eighth Karmapa's life are recommended, taking into account the spiritual biographies of his contemporaries and students, particularly 'Brug chen Padma dkar po, bKra shis rnam rgyal, the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa, and dPa' bo gstug la 'phreng ba. Investigation into his relationship with Pad ma dkar po is particularly required, and letters to the Rin spungs pa rulers and local lords also await detailed academic attention. The ground for such undertakings has been prepared here, and any approach should be aware of the intricacies of the spiritual biography genre. The Karmapa's Madhyamaka interpretations, and expositions on the Buddhist tantras, too, will engage researchers for years to come.

Regarding the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal itself, this book could only open the area of research and come to some preliminary conclusions on the basis of some case studies: As may be expected, Mi bskyod rdo rje's teachings are interspersed with reactions to Sa skya Paṇḍita, including polemics, argumentations, and stories. Like his contemporary bKa' brgyud pa masters, he was 'haunted by the ghost of Sa skya Paṇḍita'.<sup>1</sup> Yet one of his central contributions to his tradition's Great Seal lay in—similar to that of Mi pham rNam rgyal for the nineteenth-century rNying ma pa—clarifying Great Seal theory and practice through exposition and debate of the main scholastic topics and continued emphasis on Atiśa's graded path.<sup>2</sup> By giving the Karma bKa' brgyud pa more grounding in the Tibetan canon, he had tried to secure and spread the practice cherished by his school.

But, in spite of this apparently conservative stance, the Karmapa's Great Seal instructions, advices, and answers to questions reveal the radical rhetoric of immediacy typical of Great Seal traditions: the echo of Saraha, the Great Brahmin, and his *dohā* (as transmitted by Vajrapāṇi), the emphasis on Maitrīpa and the central position of sGam po pa.

Three facets have become evident in the Eighth Karmapa's Great Seal interpretations. Firstly, there is a much-needed instruction for understanding conceptualisation's true nature as Buddhahood and overcoming subtle clinging. Secondly, this instruction is taught differently: as directly letting go of artifice, on the basis of sūtra-related practices, or with the aid of the tantric path of means; different approaches are praised as superior in different texts. Finally, the common origin of these instructions is the guru. The

<sup>1</sup> This metaphor was first used by Roger Jackson on his keynote address at the *Mahāmudrā*-panel of the IATS conference, Bonn, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> For Mi pham rNam rgyal's contributions, see, for example, Smith (2001: 227–235) and Phuntsho (2005).

guru is used in meditation practices as an aid, devotion to the guru in combination with understanding conceptualisation is a soteriological sufficient factor, and realisation of the guru's ultimate state represents the goal—whether employing the yogic exercises of the path of means or not.

Whereas the first point is apparent across both commentaries and instructions, the second becomes evident through studying the different ways in which he guides students in specific instruction related genres. In how the Eighth Karmapa explained the Great Seal to Gling drung pa, the sensitive religio-political context has become evident, along with pedagogical skill. While the importance of the guru, the third point, has been duly noted in previous academic studies, this thesis wishes to take those studies further, interpreting guru-devotion and teacher-student interaction as a perspective for academic research on Great Seal traditions, which permits better explanation of doctrinal variegations.

It follows then, that there is a central Great Seal doctrine originating from the guru and his lineage, taught and adapted to various addressees. Great Seal instruction is pedagogical by nature, and occurs in its specific cultural and historical contexts. Study of the instruction-related genres is vital for its comprehension. Though one may, with biographical studies, argue for a certain approach as 'supreme', solely doctrinal concerns and classifications miss the point of Great Seal practice. It is instead necessary to consider the context of its composition and the genre from which it was taken. Elaborating on the remarks of Sherpa and David Jackson, a genre-sensitive approach is recommended for future analysis of the Great Seal, one which pays attention to specific historical contexts.

The doctrinal elements, stories, and role of the guru revolve around the rhetoric of the experience of a state beyond concepts or, expressed in modern terms, where signification comes to an end. What such practices may lead to is a question which, today, could be examined in the fields of Cognitive Science or Neuropsychology.<sup>3</sup> In the case of historical studies, it is impossible to prove or disprove such claims. One example of this difficulty is evidenced in the Eighth Karmapa's assertion that the Great Seal is crucial to avoid deviation from emptiness and subtle clinging, even after having received the empowerments. The meaning of such accounts and stories is likely, alongside authentication and authority, a simple engender-

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<sup>3</sup> For experience in the Buddhist traditions, see, for example, the contributions in Pickering (1997). Smart (2000: 546) has suggested to employ the help of the sciences in studying religious and meditative experiences.

ing of trust in the practitioner to finally use the practices (as for example in the answer to Gling drung pa).

Thus, these case studies suggest that the Great Seal of the Eighth Karmapa is better understood as an adaptable and flexible pragmatic device, where experience is conceived of as superior to claims of ultimate truth.<sup>4</sup> Instead of overvaluing debates and classifications, Great Seal instructions may be viewed as skilful means, analogous to the famed Mahāyāna concept of *upāya-kauśalya*.<sup>5</sup> This may apply to bKa' brgyud pa Great Seal in general and contributes to an understanding of 'Buddhism' primarily as practice, with the elevation of experience above philosophy, challenging essentialist readings of Buddhist philosophy and their claims of uncovering a 'real' ontology of Buddhism.<sup>6</sup> As Scherer confirms for tantric and the Great Seal traditions:

These statements are true not in an epistemological Popperian sense but true in the sense of meaningful: meaningful pointers, incitements and andragogical motivational devices towards the ultimately inexplicable experiential reality at the end of the path.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis is a first step towards an examination of the complex sources, personalities, and transmissions present in the writings of the Eighth Karmapa, advancing previous research and opening a considerable body of material to future study and academic debate.<sup>8</sup>

Historically, it is difficult to come to terms with Saraha, or locate a coherent system within his teaching.<sup>9</sup> It is also noted of sGam po pa's Great Seal that he was far from presenting any kind of uniform system, a factor which, in sGam po pa's case, is compounded by the fact that most of his works were not, in reality, authored by him. For the Eighth Karmapa,

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<sup>4</sup> The late Zhwa dmar pa, Mi pham Chos kyi blo gros (1952–2014), for example, reported that he is using the ultimate teaching from the Ninth Karmapa's guidebook for both pointing out the nature of mind directly, and as instruction on the completion stage (oral communication, July 2006).

<sup>5</sup> See Pye (2003 [1978]: 1–12) for an introduction to the concept and its terminology.

<sup>6</sup> Scherer (2006b: 6).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> One would need in future to thoroughly study the Karmapa's teaching in all remaining instructions (such as *khrid*, *man ngag*, *gdams ngag*, *bslab bya*, and also *mgur*), comparing it not only with his statements in his *dGongs gcig*, *sKu gsum ngo sprod*, and *rLung sems gnyis med kyi khrid*, but also the *Madyamakāvatāra* and *Abhisamayālamkāra* commentaries. Further study of the *dPal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung* and shorter commentaries in volume fifteen such as the *Rang la nges pa'i tshad ma* is highly recommended (see Chapter Three (3.3)).

<sup>9</sup> Jackson, R. (2004: 3–53); Braitstein (2004: 16–39).

however, manifold material is at hand and the authorship is clearer, as indicated by early title lists. This opens various avenues of research, some of which were indicated earlier. One will certainly be the Eighth Karmapa's contribution to the systematisations of the Ninth Karmapa and bKra shis rnam rgyal.

While still a hypothesis at the given state of research, it appears the Eighth Karmapa was less systematic, however, at times, more scholastic in his instructions than his successors. But did he, through his commentaries, his founding of institutes, and his political impact, prepare the ground for later, more systematic, approaches to the Great Seal? It will be fruitful to conduct such future investigations with an awareness of textual genres, teaching situations, and their addressees.





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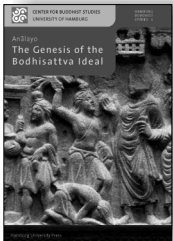
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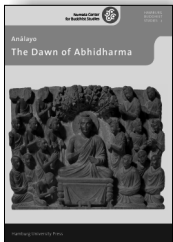
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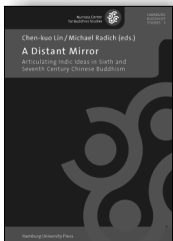
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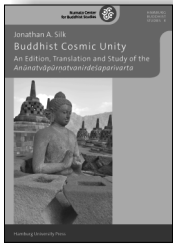
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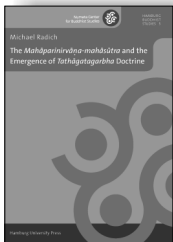
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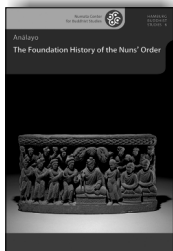
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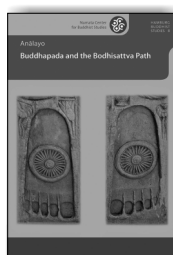
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