

Mahamudra
and the Bka' brgyud Tradition



Jackson and Kapstein (Hrsg.)
MAHĀMUDRĀ AND THE BKA'-BRGYUD TRADITION

BEITRÄGE ZUR ZENTRALASIENFORSCHUNG

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Cover: Karma Pakshi, copper alloy with copper inlay and painted details,
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PREFACE

The spiritual traditions inspired by the great translator of Lho brag, Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros, and known generally as Bka' brgyud, have had a remarkable legacy, contributing not only to the development of Tibetan religion, but to philosophy, art, literature, and politics as well. Though prominent teachers associated with several of the Bka' brgyud orders have now established teaching centres throughout the world, touching the lives of thousands of persons outside of Tibet, and though a great many texts stemming from these traditions have now been translated into English and other Western languages, as a distinct area of inquiry the focused academic study of the Bka' brgyud and their historical role in the formation of Tibetan culture is a relatively recent phenomenon. The present volume, offering the fruits of original research by twelve scholars, advances our knowledge in this field, while suggesting directions for future inquiry.

The work published here is based on presentations at two panels at the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies convened at Königswinter, Germany, in August 2006 under the auspices of the Seminar for Central Asian Studies at Bonn University. The first, concerning the Mahāmudrā teachings that are considered the very heart of Bka' brgyud contemplative teaching, was organised by Roger R. Jackson and Lara Braitstein and entitled "Phyag rgya chen po: Perspectives, Debates, Traditions and Transmissions." Besides the organisers, the contributors included Jim Rheingans, Burkhard Scherer, and Jan-Ulrich Sobisch. The second panel, commemorating the figure often considered the first representative of the unique Tibetan ecclesiastical institution of recognised hierarchical incarnation, was called "For Karma Pakshi's Octocentenary: Dialogue and Innovation in the Bka'-brgyud Traditions." Organised by Matthew T. Kapstein, it had as its other participants Karl Debreczeny, Ulrich T. Kragh, Stefan Larsson, Klaus-Dieter Mathes,

Puchung Tsering, Jann Ronis, Kurtis R. Schaeffer, and Marta Sernesi. In view of the close relationship between the two panels, and the overall quality and coherence of the new scholarship they introduced, the editors of this volume thought it advantageous that our efforts be combined. We regret that three of our colleagues (B. Scherer, Puchung Tsering, and J. Ronis) were unable to include their work in the present publication. At the same time, we were delighted that Anne Burchardi, whose communication was originally read in a panel devoted to Buddhist Philosophy, could make her research available for presentation here.

In preparing this work for publication, the editors have been guided by the intellectual architecture of the contributions, rather than the plan of the original panels. The first part, “Facets of Mahāmudrā,” begins with R.R. Jackson’s survey of contemporary scholarship and translation relating to the Mahāmudrā traditions of India and Tibet. L. Braitstein’s study of the “Adamantine Songs” attributed to the renowned *mahāsiddha* Saraha, as well as K.-D. Mathes’s examination of the compilation of “Indian Mahāmudrā Works” directed by the seventh Karma pa, both enhance our growing understanding of the ways and means whereby Indian Mahāmudrā traditions were transmitted and transmuted in Tibet.

The following section, “Traditions of Meditation and Yoga,” takes up specific Bka’ brgyud systems of spiritual discipline with reference to their text-history and practical content. U.T. Kragh examines the formation of the textual sources of the famed “Six Yogas of Nāropa,” perhaps the most celebrated of the Bka’ brgyud teachings besides the Mahāmudrā. His work has its counterpart in M. Sernesi’s study of the Aural Transmissions (*snyan brgyud*) and their place in the yoga systems specific to Bka’ brgyud esotericism. In the final chapter in this section, on “Guru Devotion” by J.-U. Sobisch, we return to the Mahāmudrā in connection with the teaching of ’Bri gung Skyobs pa, considered controversial by some, that such devotion offered in fact the “single means to realisation.”

The studies making up part three, “Contributions of the Successive Karma pas,” examine selected works—textual and artistic—produced by members of one of Tibet’s preeminent reincarnation lineages. M.T. Kapstein, in his investigation of a recently discovered and puzzling treatise by the second Karma pa, Karma Pakshi, discovers within it an apparently unique, albeit notably eccentric, defense of Mongol imperial religion. More mainstream doctrinal concerns are at issue in the two chapters that follow, though the approaches to them that we find here are strikingly original nevertheless. A. Burchardi’s topic is the seventh Karma pa’s treatment of reflexive awareness, a key element in Buddhist epistemological theory, in relation to the controversial doctrine of “extrinsic emptiness,” or *gzhan stong*, while J. Rheingans examines the eighth Karma pa’s remarks on Mahāmudrā in a letter responding to the questions of a disciple. In the closing chapter of part three, K. Debreczeny introduces us to the remarkable artistic production of the tenth Karma pa in a study based on painstaking efforts to locate and document the identifiable paintings that survive.

The last section of the volume is devoted to the famous “Madman of Gtsang,” Gtsang smyon Heruka, the author of the best-loved of Tibetan literary masterworks, his redaction of the biography and songs of the poet-saint Mi la ras pa. S. Larsson’s contribution offers an overview of his youth and early career, placing his relation to the Bka’ brgyud tradition in a new, nuanced perspective. K.R. Schaeffer focuses on Gtsang smyon’s later achievement, and that of his followers, in bringing important parts of the Bka’ brgyud heritage into print for the first time. In this regard, one may note that Gtsang smyon also played a particularly strong role in the redaction of the Aural Transmissions studied by M. Sernesi in her contribution as mentioned above.

In reflecting upon the work found here overall, we may note two broad tendencies underlying much of current Bka’ brgyud-related research. On the one hand, there is a significant interest in the early formation of the Bka’ brgyud orders, the particular doctrines and practices that distinguished them, and the hagiographical traditions surrounding their founding adepts. Besides

this, a second area of focused study that is beginning to emerge concerns the great masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, figures such as the seventh and eighth Karma pas, as well as 'Brug chen Padma dkar po, Dwags po Bkra shis rnam rgyal, Gtsang smyon Heruka, and others. While much of the attention devoted to them concerns their important legacy in philosophy and religious thought, we must also recognize that their rise to prominence accompanied the age of Bka' brgyud political dominance in Central Tibet. It is a task for future research to disclose more thoroughly than so far has been possible the precise relationships between the religious developments that have mostly interested scholars to date and the material and political conditions that enabled them.

Roger R. Jackson & Matthew T. Kapstein

Lo gsar, Year of the Iron Hare, 2011

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THE EIGHTH KARMA PA'S ANSWER TO GLING DRUNG PA: A CASE STUDY*

JIM RHEINGANS

1 Introduction

[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 foolish me with compassion!¹

Though often considered primarily a meditational lineage, the Bka' brgyud pa traditions have produced numerous scholars. Among them, the eighth Karma pa, Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), was undoubtedly one of the most learned masters within his Karma Bka' brgyud school, which enjoyed great support from the most powerful rulers of Tibet from the late fifteenth until the early

* I would like to thank David Jackson, Klaus-Dieter Mathes, Alexander Schiller, Mkhan po Nges don, and Ulrich Kragh for helpful suggestions on earlier versions of this article. It was composed in 2007 in the context of research on the life and Great Seal interpretation of Mi bskyod rdo rje for my dissertation, completed in 2008: see Rheingans 2008; and Rheingans 2010 and forthcoming for additional studies of the eighth Karma pa's life and teaching. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the School of Historical and Cultural Studies (Bath Spa University, U.K.) in the course of my work on the dissertation.

¹ The concluding verses of Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po zhi gnas kyi khrid*, fol. 4a: *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 /*.

sixteenth century (especially from 1498–1517/18).² The Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506) had actually initiated an independent sūtra exegetical tradition within his sect, composing the only Karma Bka' bgyud work on *pramāṇa*.³ The scholastic trend continued with the eighth Karma pa, whose agenda included commenting on four of the five main non-tantric subjects.⁴ Previous academic research on his doctrines has concentrated mainly on his well-known *Madhyamakāvatāra* commentary and his *rang stong* Madhyamaka philosophical position. His *gzhan stong* works, such as the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentary and the *Gzhan stong legs par smra ba'i sgron me*, have been also taken into account.⁵ But his Great Seal (*mahāmudrā*)

² From 1498 to 1518 the Rin spungs pa lords, who were supporters of the Seventh Karma pa and the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, had ruled with an iron fist over Dbus and Gtsang (D. Jackson 1989a: 29ff.). The eighth Karma pa witnessed the transition from relative peace and strong central rule to increasing instability, especially in Dbus, culminating in the period of great unrest in the late 1540s.

³ Chos grags rgya mtsho, Karma pa VII, *Tshad ma'i bstan bcos*. See the article by Burchardi in this volume.

⁴ Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, Prajñāparāmitā, and Vinaya (cf. also Brunnhölzl 2004: 19). The fifth was of course Pramāṇa.

⁵ Mullin (1978) and Richardson (1998) translated very short works. In 1980 a translation of the *Bka' bgyud mgur mtsho* edited by Mi bskyod rdo rje was published by the Nālandā Translation Committee, which also published very brief prayers in 1997. Karmay (1980) occasionally referred to polemics against the Rnying ma pa. Williams (1983 a and b) and Ruegg (1988, 2000) have dealt with the eighth Karma pa's view on Madhyamaka using the *spyi don* section of the *Dwags*. Stearns (1999) has also used his *Gzhan stong*, as did Brunnhölzl (2004), who offers the most extensive study of the eighth Karma pa's Madhyamaka. Parts of the commentary have been translated (Mikyö Dorje 2006). Mathes (2008) has, in his recent publication, used the eighth Karma pa's *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentary and shown that Mi bskyod rdo rje's *gzhan stong* resembles Rang 'byung rdo rje's position in his *Zab mo nang gi don*. The only academic study of the Karma pa's life is Verhufen (1995), whose main reference is to Si tu and 'Be lo's *Kaṃ tshang*.

instructions in minor works have been neglected so far. Though these teachings form the heart of his tradition's religious instructions, no one has investigated how the eighth Karma pa taught the Great Seal to his various students.

This essay aims to examine his Great Seal teachings, especially as he expressed them in one of his minor works, the replies to questions (*dris lan*) asked by Gling drung A gdong pa.⁶ In the following brief case study, I shall look more closely at the recipient, sectarian circumstances, and contexts of his answers. Works of the *dris lan* genre are particularly suitable for such an investigation as they often offer short treatments of doctrinal questions.⁷ In addition, some minor commentaries and passages focusing on the Great Seal will be taken into account. The recent publication of Mi bskyod rdo rje's *gsung 'bum*, allows further insights into his life and literary works.⁸ Given the vast scope of his writings, the present foray cannot pretend to scratch more than the surface of this theme.

⁶ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Gling drung la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, 3 fols.

⁷ The Tibetan genre as such has not yet been studied exhaustively but deserves more scholarly attention. A related genre, the more polemical "answers to refutations" (*dgag lan*), has been examined to some extent (Lopez 1997). The *dgag lan*, however, respond to criticism rather than answer a question.

⁸ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma-pa VIII, *Collected Works*. For a further survey of the history and content of his writings, see my PhD thesis (Rheingans 2008: 57–72). The now-available published collection provides us with two major *rnam thar* authored by Mi bskyod rdo rje's close students as well as different spiritual autobiographies (*rang rnam*) containing valuable historical information: Byang chub bzang po, A khu a khrag Dge slong, *Rgyal ba kun gyi dbang* (37 fols.), is a source on the Karma pa's early years (up to 1513) authored by an attendant. It was also used by Gtsug lag 'phreng ba for his account of Mi bskyod rdo rje in the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. Sangs rgyas Dpal sgrub attended the Karma pa from 1539 onwards, and his *Rgyal ba spyen ras gzigs* (90 fols.) contains additional information. It also enlists two sources that are unavailable to date: a *rnam thar* composed by Grub pa'i dbang phyug Sgam po mkhan po Śākya dge slong bzang po and one authored by Bla ma Dpon yig (*ibid.*, fol. 83b). See Rheingans 2010, for a further discussion of the *rnam thar* sources.

2 The Great Seal in the minor texts

With regard to the theory of the Great Seal, a number of interpretations can be found in the eighth Karma pa's minor commentaries, instructions, and *dris lan*. Let us briefly locate these sources in his *Collected Works*. One of his most important students, the fifth Zhwa dmar, Dkon mchog yan lag (1525–83), composed a catalogue (*dkar chag*) of the Karma pa's collected writings (*gsung 'bum*).⁹ The Zhwa dmar pa divided his list of titles into six major sections (*mdor byas*), the structure of which was also used as a template for the recent Lhasa edition of Mi bskyod rdo rje's literary works.¹⁰

The first section of the eighth Karma pa's œuvre, filling volumes one and two of the *Collected Works*, consists of spiritual biographies (*rnam thar*) and adamantine songs (*rdo rje'i glu*). Apart from a few dialogues in a *rnam thar*,¹¹ the Great Seal is frequently mentioned in the *rdo rje'i glu* subsection, especially in five texts. The second section, making up volume three, contains a variety of genres: letters (*'phrin yig*), praises (*bstod tshogs*), questions and answers (*dris lan*), works of advice (*bslab bya*), and prayers (*smon lam*). Great Seal teachings are found here among the *bslab bya* and especially in the *dris lan*. From among the sixteen *dris lan* (nos. 29 to 44 of volume 3; their length

⁹ According to his *rnam thar* in Situ and 'Be lo (*Kam tshang*, p. 391) the fifth Zhwa dmar pa met the Karma pa in Tsā ri and received the blessing (*byin rlabs*) to complete the collection (*bka' 'bum*) of the Karma pa's writings. He began to compile this table of contents seven years before the Karma pa passed away in 1547, and completed it in 1555 (Kon mchog 'bangs, Zhwa dmar V, *Rgyal ba thams cad*, p. 230). For a further survey of sources about the Great Seal in the eighth Karmapa's *gsung 'bum*, see also Rheingans (2008: 72–76).

¹⁰ The *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (p. 1313) mentions that the *bka' 'bum* amounted to “slightly more than thirty volumes” (*sum bcu [sic] lhag*). It seems that shortly after the eighth Karma pa passed away a golden manuscript was compiled under the patronage of Chos mdzad ma rnam grol, which comprised thirty volumes (*ibid.*).

¹¹ Byang chub bzang po, A khu a khrag Dge slong, *Rgyal ba kun gyi dbang* (see also below).

varies from two to sixty-nine folios), ten contain major passages or questions on the Great Seal, though it is not always explicitly mentioned.

The third section contains commentaries on sūtra and mantra. It is by far the most extensive section, comprising volumes 4 through 16. Included here are the large commentaries on Madhyamaka and other Indian treatises (*rgya gzhung*), along with elaborate material on the 'Bri gung *dgongs gcig* doctrine and Buddhist tantra.¹² A wealth of material, including shorter commentaries dealing with the Great Seal, is found in volume 15. Volumes 17 and 18 contain the texts of section four, rituals (*cho ga*) and *sādhana*s (*sgrub thabs*).

The fifth section contains practical instructions (*khrid*) and esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), and is found in volumes 18–25 of the *Collected Works*. Volume 19 contains the previously (1976) published shorter instructions (*khrid thung*)¹³ and consists of precepts on a diversity of topics, some of which deal with the Great Seal. Finally, volumes 21–25 include occasional commentaries on the Great Seal, principally in its tantric context. The last section, dedicated to the “common sciences” (*thun mong rig gnas*), such as grammar and linguistics, can be found in volume 26.

Before turning to the *dris lan*, which are central to this essay, some passages presenting the non-tantric and tantric Great Seal need to be touched upon very briefly in order to give an impression of the Karma pa's teaching style. These are drawn from a hagiography (*rnam thar*), a brief advice on blessing (*bslab bya*), and a short commentary on the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*).¹⁴

The earliest documented teachings on the subject ascribed to the eighth Karma pa are dialogues about meditation found in the *rnam thar* composed by

¹² Three volumes alone (5, 6 and 7) are devoted to the *dgongs gcig* teaching of the 'Bri gung pa, which include a *rnam thar* of 'Bri gung Skyobs pa 'Jig rten gsum dgon (1143–1217).

¹³ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Gdams khrid man ngag gi rim pa*.

¹⁴ Due to the scope of the present essay, these texts are only briefly introduced here. They contain much more elaborate discussions that cannot be presented in full.

Mi bskyod rdo rje's attendant, A khu A khra. While representing a relatively direct way of teaching without much doctrinal elaboration, they use the specific doctrine of the Bka' brgyud Great Seal in teaching about conceptualisation as dharmakāya.¹⁵ In 1513 the young Karma pa travelled around Lho rong and Khams and met Rgya ston Nang so Seng ge ba:

The next day in Rag yul [at the] bridge, Rgya ston Nang so Seng ge ba said: "You must grant me a dharma [teaching]."

[Karma pa] said: "In that case, the essence (*ngo bo*) of conceptual thoughts (*rnam rtog*) is the dharmakāya. Therefore, conceptualisation and absolute awareness (*ye shes*) being undifferentiated is the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). Much need not be said—that suffices."¹⁶

In the ensuing exchange the next morning, he asked:

"Sir (*lags*), is there [anything] for accomplishing buddhahood apart from the ordinary mind?"

[Karma pa] said: "No, there is nothing apart [from it]."

[Rgya ston] asked: "Is there a phenomenon (*chos*)¹⁷ or buddha not contained ('*dus pa*) within ordinary mind?"

[Karma pa] said: "Not a single one. If there is, you bring [it] and I will keep (*nya ra*) it!"¹⁸

¹⁵ In what follows, I give just a short excerpt. All four dialogues will be found translated and studied in Rheingans forthcoming.

¹⁶ Byang chub bzang po, A khu a khrag, *Rgyal ba kun gyi dbang po*, fol. 28a: *phyi nyin rag yul zam kha na rgya ston nang so seng ge bas nged la chos shig gnang 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.*

¹⁷ Here, *chos* might also indicate the buddha-qualities (*yon tan*).

¹⁸ Ibid. fol. 28b: *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 shus*

Finally, regarding its cultivation, the Karma pa commented:

[Rgya ston] asked: “Does one need to cultivate (*sgom*) this ordinary mind or not?”

[Karma pa] replied: “Beginners need to cultivate it. Then [later] there is no need [to do so].”¹⁹

Also in the other early dialogues the underlying strand in the discussion is the understanding of mind by comprehending conceptualisation as being, in essence, dharmakāya. Though formally not even the name ‘Great Seal’ is mentioned, this direct way of instruction seems to be in line with the path of direct cognition favoured by Sgam po pa.²⁰

In the *Identification of the Blessing of the Great Seal* (*Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*), a much later text preserved in the *bslab bya* section of the *Collected Works*, the Karma pa emphasises the importance of blessing (*byin rlabs*) for training in the practice of the Great Seal.²¹ 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

pas gcig kyang med / yod na khyod kyi [read *kyis*] *khyer la shog dang ngas nya ra bya gsungs.*

¹⁹ Ibid. fol. 28b: *tha mal shes pa de sgom dgos sam mi dgos zhus pas / las dang po pas sgom dgos gsungs de nas mi dgos gsungs.*

²⁰ For Sgam po pa's Three Paths system see Sherpa 2000: 129–36. For Sgam po pa's Great Seal see Kragh 1999: 29–39 and Mathes 2006: 2.

²¹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, fol. 2a. 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 'dud*). 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, Karma pa VIII, *Byang phyogs 'di na karma pa*, fol. 7b; Dkon mchog dbangs, Zhwa dmar V, *Rgyal ba thams cad*, fol. 7a). It is thus likely that the eighth Karma pa composed this text.

śamatha and *vipaśyanā*, elaborating the proper manner of practice and the experiences arising from it. 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*).²²

Indeed, for the eighth Karma pa 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 practice of the two stages of tantric meditation, which the Karma pa shortly 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.²³ Quoting various masters, the Karma pa underlines how important it is to practise under the guidance of a teacher and in accordance with one's capacities while not

²² Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin* fol. 3a: *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 /*

²³ Ibid. fol. 4a (p. 740). The text goes on to quote various masters on the process of tantric meditation, including Saraha, Nāgārjuna, and Asaṅga (fol. 4a–5b). Finally, the Karma pa explains the result of the Great Seal, namely the state of a Vajradhara and the three buddha-bodies (fol. 5b). In the last lines, the eighth Karma pa suggests that Buddhist practice needs to be done according to the capacities of the individual (fol. 6b).

forgetting the basic contemplations.²⁴ We have to remember that the context indicated by the title was the blessing of the Great Seal—this blessing being connected to the Vajrayāna—and this is exactly the understanding of the Great Seal he conveys.²⁵ Unfortunately, not much is known about the historical circumstances or the audience of this work.

In another short commentary, called *Avoiding the Mistake of Explaining Superficial Obscuration as the Ordinary Mind* (*Glo bur gyi dri ma tha mal gyi shes par bshad pa'i nor ba spang ba*), Mi bskyod rdo rje is concerned with explaining the correct understanding and cultivation of the ordinary mind. Here he uses more elaborate terminology than in the previous dialogues.²⁶ As indicated by the title, the work sets out to defend the Great Seal and its key term *tha mal gyi shes pa* against misunderstandings and jealousy. He consequently praises it as the quick path traveled by all the Indian siddhas and explains the correct meaning of the ordinary mind using terminology from both the *pramāṇa* and *phar phyin* treatises. Mi bskyod rdo rje then quotes Mi la ras pa and advises the Great Seal practitioner to avoid the “three delaying diversions” (*gol sa gsum*) related to experiences from *śamatha*, and the “four occasions for straying” (*shor sa bzhi*) into a wrong understanding of *śūnyatā*.²⁷

²⁴ As seen in the introductory quote and from the *rnam thar* (see note 45 below), Mi bskyod rdo rje strongly emphasised the graded path of the three kinds of individuals (see also Rheingans 2008: 156–59).

²⁵ Sgam po pa also labelled the mantra-paths to the Great Seal the “path of blessing” (cf. Sherpa 2004: 129–37, 142–50).

²⁶ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Glo bur gyi dri ma*. This text contains many interesting definitions and debates, which cannot fully be presented here. It was requested by the scribe Bod pa rgya bo and was written by the Karma pa in Kong stod 'or shod. It is found in the *dkar chag* of Dkon mchog dbangs, Zhwa dmar V, *Rgyal ba thams cad*, fol. 9a but not in the title list of the eighth Karma pa. It could therefore have been composed after 1546.

²⁷ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Glo bur gyi dri ma*, fol. 3af. For the *gol sa* and *shor sa*, see also Namgyal 1986: 293–313 and Jackson 1994: 181–85, who translates Sa

He then uses the four-yoga system of the Great Seal, as taught by Atiśa,²⁸ to explain the graded path (*lam rim*) of spiritual development. He concludes his work by saying:

The ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) explained above was taught by the incomparable Sgam po pa in different answers, saying “One must cultivate the essence.”²⁹

3 The Answer to a Question by Gling drung pa

The *Answer to a Question Asked by Gling drung pa La 'dor ba* (*Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*), the main focus of this paper, presents doctrinally and historically interesting views and stories. To date, only one version of the text is available: the one published in the *Collected Works*.³⁰ It is not that easy to understand the exact context of this work. One encounters difficulties even

paṇ's criticism in the *Thubs pa'i dgongs gsal*, which maintains that precisely this teaching is not from the Buddha. Mi bskyod rdo rje remarks here in the *Glo bur gyi dri ma* that Sa paṇ's critique in the *Sdom gsum rab dbye* (*blun po'i phyag rgya che sgom pa / phal cher dud 'gro'i gnas su skye*) would apply to these delaying diversions (*gol sa*) that are tantamount to the danger of getting stuck in *śamatha*.

²⁸ Bkra shis nam rgyal also mentions such a system of four yogas in the *lhan cig skyes sbyor* as transmitted to Atiśa by Dgon pa ba (Namgyal 1986: 358).

²⁹ Ibid. fol. 4a: *mnyam med sgam po pas ngo bo sgom dgos zhes lan du mar gsungs pa yang gong du bshad pa'i tha mal gyi shes pa de'o*.

³⁰ Unfortunately the original manuscript could not be consulted. As has been pointed out above, the *Collected Works* contain some misspellings. The supplement to the *Collected Works* talks about various sources used for their publication. From among the seven sources that I have determined were used, the *dris lan* probably stems from one of the following: two versions of manuscripts stored in 'Bras spungs (i.a), manuscripts from the Po ta la (i.b), or the more obscure category of “whatever writings and prints that were found in Dbus and Gtsang” (v.); (Karma bde legs, *Dpe sgrigs gsal bshad*, p. 6: *kham dbus kyī bris dpar ci rig rnyed pa rnams*). See chapter three of my dissertation (Rheingans 2008: 57–72).

when trying to identify the recipient, whose name appears on the title page as *Gling drung pa La 'dor ba*. Whereas the name mentioned in the first lines of the text reads *Gling A mdong Drung pa* (fol. 1b), the entry listed in the *dkar chag* of the fifth Zhwa dmar reads “Answers to questions of Gling drung A mdong pa” (*Gling drung pa a mdong pa'i dris lan*).³¹

Given the fact that the editors of the modern *Collected Works* were imprecise at other times, I suggest that 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.³²

Gling or Gling tshang, the place of the questioner designated by the name, is the name of an eastern Tibetan kingdom.³³ In the *nam thar* sources about the eighth Karma pa, two slightly contradictory references indicate that the Karma pa travelled there and passed on teachings to members of the Gling noble family in the year 1519. With regard to major events of the eighth Karma

³¹ Dkon mchog dbangs, Zhwa dmar V, *Rgyal ba thams cad*, fol. 5b.

³² The elements of the name are three: (i) place, (ii) title, and (iii) further specification, probably of place of origin. Looking at the first reading, we find *Gling* as the place, *Drung* as a title, and “One of La 'dor” (*la 'dor ba'i*) as a further specification. The third version has as specification “One of A mdong” and thus deviates slightly. The second version merely applies the title, *Drung*, to the third element of the name and has as the second element again “One of A mdong” (*A mdong pa*). Therefore, the actual variation is between *A mdong ba* and *La 'dor ba*, which are probably two scribal attempts at writing what was originally a single name (the characters *a* and *la* as well as *nga* and *ra* being easily mistaken in cursive script, while the prefix *'* and *m* are interchangeable). I follow the *dkar chag* of the fifth Zhwa dmar pa for the time being. However, it may be noted that the term *la dor ba* (according to Zhang Yisun old for *thag gcod pa*) seems to be a rare phrase indicating meditative accomplishment in Sa skya pa *lam 'bras*-doctrine (Davidson 2004: 297n16).

³³ 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).

pa'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, traveled around in eastern Tibet.

The *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* states that he had a vision of Nāgārjuna and was then “invited by Gling drung pa Ting 'od pa,³⁴ uncle and nephew, and went to Zil mdar.”³⁵ 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.

A later source, Si tu and 'Be lo's *Kam tshang*, recounts the events in a different manner. It says—at a similar place within the narrative—that the eighth Karma pa 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.³⁶ Then he went to the Mgo zi hermitage and imparted many “prophecies” (*lung bstan*) to a Gling drung pa Ting 'dzin bzang po.³⁷

Though in general the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* is the older and more detailed source, I assume that Si tu's statements about geography are more

³⁴ Probably short for Ting ['dzin] 'od [zer] pa.

³⁵ *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 lhag 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 /*

³⁶ This is probably Si tu's version of the *Zil mdar* in the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*.

³⁷ Si tu and 'Be lo, *Kam tshang*, p. 316: *gling tshang gyi gdan drangs / tsi nang du 'phags pa klu grub zhal gzigs / ba zis mdor zla gcig bzhugs / mgo zi ri khrod du phebs gling drung pa ting 'dzin bzang por lung bstan mang po mdzad*.

accurate.³⁸ At least later, Mgo zi (or Guzi) in northwest Sde dge was the site of a Ngor pa monastery.³⁹ The monastery in Zil mdar or Mgo zi was most likely the Bkra shis rnam rgyal monastery of the Gling drung pa, mentioned once in a *rang rnam* as among the monasteries in which the Karma pa erected buildings.⁴⁰ The question remains as to whether the two Gling drung pas mentioned in the two sources, namely Gling drung pa Ting 'dzin bzang po and Gling drung pa Ting 'dzin 'od zer, are two different persons or whether this is a name variation. Furthermore, which one can be identified with the 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 Karma pa, dated 1546.⁴¹ 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, but indicates that it was probably a written teaching or a letter composed by the Karma pa and sent to the student (as opposed to notes the student made in a teaching situation):

³⁸ Looking at the differences in the two sources examined above, it has to be taken into account that (a) Si tu and 'Be lo may have had access to two early sources, which are now lost (see note on *rnam thar* above), and (b) Si tu was from Sde dge and was well acquainted with this region and its history.

³⁹ The Si tu Sprul sku prior to Si tu Paṇ chen had been born into the family of the Ngor pa patrons (written communication, Prof. D. Jackson, June 2007). For the Ngor pa, see also D. Jackson 1989b.

⁴⁰ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Byang phyogs 'di na karma pa*, fol. 10b: *gling drung pa bkra shis rnam rgyal gyi sde*.

⁴¹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Byang phyogs 'di na karma pa*, fols. 4a–9b.

[H]e, who only sees a fraction of the Great Seal of Bka' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje, Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje, sent this to Mdo khams. By virtue of that may all beings become liberated by means of the Great Seal!⁴²

The traditional deferential, "who only sees a fraction of the Great Seal," points to the eighth Karma pa as the author. It also shows that the Karma pa probably wrote the reply somewhere in Central Tibet and sent it to Mdo khams. One possibility is that the answer was written after 1546 and therefore did not find entry into the Karma pa's title list. Only after the eighth Karma pa's passing were all documents related to the teaching of the revered masters assembled by the fifth Zhwa dmar pa and compiled into a collection.⁴³

We know that the Karma pa first visited Gling drung around 1519, yet the answer was probably written after he travelled to Central Tibet, maybe as late as the 1540s. Presuming that there was no thirty-year gap between question and answer, I assume that the recipient of this text, Gling drung A mdong pa, came from the milieu of the other Gling drung pa mentioned in the *rnam thar*, and is most likely a relative or nephew of those persons mentioned in the sources. Perhaps by that time the Gling tshang lords were already devoted to the Ngor pa.⁴⁴

Neither of the Gling drung pas is mentioned among the lists of students found in the *rnam thars* about Mi bskyod rdo rje. It is thus probable that he did

⁴² Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa 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*.

⁴³ Another option would be that the text was authored earlier but only inserted into the collection at a later point by the fifth Zhwa dmar pa.

⁴⁴ A further indication of Mi bskyod rdo rje's relation to the Gling tshang lords is the 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 and our knowledge of later developments.

not figure among the closest Bka' brgyud pa students of the eighth Karma pa, but, as his question will reveal, he had received Sa skya pa and Ngor pa teachings, and also considered the Karma pa as his teacher, or at least as a competent scholar. The various *nam thar* sources relate that Mi bskyod rdo rje emphasised the graded path of the "three kinds of individuals" (*skyes bu gsum gyi lam rim*) with the aid of Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*.⁴⁵ It was only from his twenty-seventh year onwards that he taught the graded tantra path (*gsang sngags lam gyi rim pa*) to a restricted number of individuals.⁴⁶ If we consider the content of the *dris lan* as at least in part belonging to this category, we can assume a teacher-student relationship between Gling drung pa and the eighth Karma pa.⁴⁷

Before further speculating on the circumstances of this work, let us briefly examine its contents. The question directly addresses a key issue in an old doctrinal debate about the Great Seal:

⁴⁵ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nam thar rje nyid kyis nam thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa*, fol. 6a. We know from this *rang nam* that this was the command of his root teacher Sangs rgyas mnyan pa. The teaching on the three kinds of individuals is also part of the topical outline of Sangs rgyas dpal sgrub, *Rgyal ba spyang ras gzigs dbang brgyad pa'i nam thar*, fol. 35aff. Dpa' bo Rin po che tells us that his master, when expounding the great treatises of sūtra and mantra, mainly used the graded path of the Bka' gdams pa as a means for turning the students' minds towards the dharma. To worthy students he taught the extraordinary Vajrayāna instructions, stages, and visualisations (*Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1309f.)

⁴⁶ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i nam thar rje nyid kyis nam thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa*, fol. 6a.

⁴⁷ The *dris lan* contains tantric teachings 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 Karma pa'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 support the idea that Gling drung pa was a student of the Karma pa, though—as will be discussed below—a precise determination of their relationship and of the political circumstances may substantially contribute to an understanding of the contents.

I will respond to what Gling A mdong Drung pa from Khams has asked:

“Are the two, the meaning of the fourth empowerment of the unsurpassable⁴⁸ mantra as held by the glorious Sa skya pas 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?”⁴⁹

In his answer,⁵⁰ the Karma pa first explains the meaning of the fourth empowerment according to what he had heard from “some lamas” of the Ngor branch of Sa skya, probably alluding to the questioner’s background. 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 that he is not completely sure about their definition.⁵¹

The Karma pa then goes on to draw a more general distinction, namely that, in general (*spyir*), there are two kinds of empowerment in the **niruttara-yoga-tantra*: “mundane” (*’jig rten pa*) and “supramundane” (*’jig rten las ’das pa*). The Kālacakra would be the only tantra belonging to the supramundane category:

Because in the father tantras, such as the cycles of Guhyasamāja and Yamāntaka, and in all the mother tantras, such as Cakrasaṃvara and

⁴⁸ “Unsurpassable” (*bla med*) refers to the unsurpassable *yoga-tantra*, the **niruttara-yoga-tantra*.

⁴⁹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Gling drung pa la ’dor ba’i dris lan*, fol. 1b: *’dir kham nas gling a ’dong* [sic!, emended to *mdong* in the translation] *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 bya ste*.

⁵⁰ Ibid. fol. 1b.

⁵¹ Ibid. fol. 1b.

Hevajra, nothing [else] is taught 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.⁵²

The Karma pa explains⁵³ that the *karma*- and *jñāna-mudrā* of the third empowerment used for achieving the fourth empowerment are those for

⁵² Ibid. fol. 1b: *gsang 'dus 'jigs byed gshed skor sogs pha rgyud / bde dgyes sogs ma rgyud thams cad nas* [fol. 2a] *'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.*

⁵³ The Kālacakra is often viewed as the pinnacle of tantra in various traditions (and it claims so itself; see for example Wallace 2000: 6, who quotes *Kālacakratāntra*, V. 243: “In every king of tantras, the Vajrī concealed the vajra-word, and in the Ādibuddha, he taught it explicitly and in full for the sake of the liberation of 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].”). To determine the precise meaning of the teachings in this passage of the Karma pa's *dris lan*, more specific research is needed, which would exceed the scope of the present paper. The passage is nevertheless paraphrased roughly so as to give an impression of the Karma pa's view in his answer that seems to be in line with some of his other works (see also Rheingans 2008: 225–31). As a first indication for future research, similar teachings can be found in the bulky *Pointing out the Three Kāyas* (*Sku gsum ngo sprod*), which the eighth Karma pa 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 **niruttara* class (vol. 21, fol. 236b). The Karma pa 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). Mi bskyod rdo rje uses a similar line of argument about the mundane and supramundane empowerments, quoting Saraha on 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 (*'jig rten pa'i ye*

obtaining the worldly *siddhis*. What is reached with these mundane empowerments is also called “inferior Vajrasattva” (*rdor sems nyi tshe ba*). Only with the supramundane empowerments from the Kālacakra will one attain the ultimate goal: the “pervading Vajrasattva” (*khyab pa'i rdor sems*). In this system the third empowerment—which brings 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 (*dang po'i sangs rgyas*, Skt. *ādibuddha*),⁵⁴ the Great Seal itself (*phyag rgya chen po nyid*) is brought to accomplishment. He sums up his discussion of the first part of his answer:

Therefore, concerning the supramundane fourth empowerment which comes from the Kālacakra 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 speaking thus is that there exists a continuum [of the tantras] with respect to objects of knowledge in general.⁵⁵

shes) (cf. *Dpal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi gsung*, fol. 45aff.). At the end of his own ritual for Kālacakra practice, the eighth Karma pa also praises the Kālacakra as the “ultimate vehicle” (*mthar thug gyi theg pa*, Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Bcom ldan 'das dpal dus kyi 'khor lo*, fol. 117b). It will also be necessary to evaluate Mi bskyod rdo rje's commentary on Kālacakra, *Bcom ldan 'das dang po'i sangs rgyas*, and tantric works of the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (see also Schaeffer 1995) as well as Bu ston.

⁵⁴ Ibid. fol. 2a.

⁵⁵ Ibid. fol 2b: *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 rnams smra bar byed pa ni shes bya spyi pa la rgyud yod pa'i de yin*. The last passage is slightly ambiguous. The interpretation found in the text above assumes that just as there are tantras higher with respect to objects of knowledge in general but still part of the same continuum, there is a distinction of the tantras as ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ but still part of the same continuum. Alternatively, one may read:

Thus, the Karma pa has set out to answer the question by first specifying how he understands the fourth empowerment, emphasising the superiority of the Kālacakra. But he has not yet touched upon the main concern of the questioner, the Great Seal of the Bka' brgyud pa. In the following passage, he presents in similar terms the impossibility of discussing the teachings 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 as or different from the supramundane and mundane fourth empowerment from the tantra scriptures.

The 'Bri khung 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."⁵⁶ The Great Brahmin (Saraha) too has said:⁵⁷

"... when saying [this] is that which exists for the tantras as conceptual objects of [verbally expressed] knowledge." In any case, the statement implies that the Karma pa and other scholars accept this distinction of the tantras into higher and lower.

⁵⁶ The three great ones are mentioned in section VI (about view, meditation, and action), statement 8 of 'Jig rten mgon po's *Dgongs gcig*: "realisation that is untouched by the three great ones" (Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Dam pa'i chos dgongs pa gcig pa'i dka' 'grel*, p. 444: *chen po gsum gyi ma reg pa'i rtogs pa*). In his two *dgongs gcig*-commentaries, Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659) refers here to *dbu ma chen po*, *phyag rgya chen po*, and *rdzogs pa chen po* (ibid. 444–445 and Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Dam pa'i chos dgongs pa gcig pa'i rnam bshad*, p. 276f.;). See also Ruegg (1988: 1259 [11]n43), who mentions Dbon po Shes rab 'byung gnas, *Dam chos dgongs pa gcig pa'i gzhung*, fol. 5a. Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje quotes the same saying by the 'Bri gung pa in his *Dwags* (fol. 6b). The *chen po gsum* can at other times be related to the three mudrās, i.e. *karma-*, *dharma-*, and *samayamudrā* as opposed to the *mahāmudrā* (cf. *Rgya gzhung*, vol. *om*, p. 571). See also one of Mi bskyod rdo rje's own definitions of *chen po* within the *phyag rgya chen po*: Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Phyag rgya chen po'i bshad pa rtogs brjod utpal gyi phreng ba*, fol. 14a: *chen po ni / las chos / dam tshig las 'das pa*: "Great' [means]: beyond *karma-*, *dharma-* and

“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),⁵⁸ others make it a theory of emptiness;⁵⁹ hence mostly [people] have entered what is incompatible⁶⁰ [with it].⁶¹

samaya-[mudrā].” That, however, does not indicate them as being beyond the fourth empowerment, which is then pointed to by the following quotation of Saraha.

⁵⁷ The whole complex in the *dohā* is a refutation first of non-Buddhists (1–9), then Hinayāna (10), Mahāyāna (11) and Mantrayāna (11ff.). See Schaeffer 2000: 303–7 (critical edition lines 1–46).

⁵⁸ *Nam mkha'i* = *āśā* or *gaṇa*; *kham*s = *bhūa* (cf. Tilopa 1, 1a in R. Jackson 2004).

⁵⁹ 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*.

⁶⁰ *Mi mthun phyogs*. This part of the verse is only available in Tibetan. The translation “contradiction,” favoured by both Schaeffer (2000: 277) and R. Jackson (2004: 12), could be also understood differently (cf. Shahidullah 1928: 129 ad stanza 11). Because *mi thun phyogs* = Old Bengali/Maithili *bipakha* (cf. *Cāryagītī* 16 [Mahitta], 4d Kværne 1977: 142: *re bipakha kobī na dekhī*); Munidatta ad loc. *punaḥ kleśaṃ vipakṣi-karinaṃ na paśyati* (Kværne 1977: 144 Tib.: *mi mthun phyogs byed pa mi mthong ba'o*). This suggests a meaning such as ‘obstacle’; I have 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 contradictoires” and “the contrary” (cf. Udayana [11th Century CE], *Ātmatattvaviveka*, Laine 1998: 74). For *sapakṣa/vipakṣa* as Indian Buddhist logical terms see Ram-Prasad 2002: 345–46: “homologue”; Ganeri 2003: 38: “heterologue”; Barnhardt 2001: 557: “example and counter-example/counter-positive

Mi bskyod rdo rje avoids classifying Sgam po pa's Great Seal as tantra or not. He interprets Saraha's term "the fourth" (*bzhi pa*) as the fourth empowerment, suiting his purpose of proving the fourth empowerment as not necessarily in accordance with the Great Seal.⁶² Then, he 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, concerning the Great Seal upheld by the Bka' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje: In the great timeless (*ye*) freedom from the impurities of experiences, realisations, views, and philosophical systems of the four mundane and supramundane empowerments and so forth, one settles in the unfabricated *om sva re*⁶³ while it [the Great Seal] appears spontaneously as the primordial buddha, the timeless presence itself!⁶⁴

example"; see Staal 1962 as reviewed by Ram-Prasad 2002: 346: "logical equivalence through contraposition"; Shaw 2002: 216: *pakṣa* = "locus of inference." I would like to thank Burkhard Scherer for helpful suggestions and related references.

⁶¹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 2b: *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 zhug / la la nam mhka'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 /.*

⁶² In this interpretation he follows the 13th century Tibetan writer Bcom ldan ral gri, alias Rig pa'i ral gri; see Schaeffer 2000: 276.

⁶³ According to Mkhan po Nges don (oral communication August 2007), it is occasionally used as a colloquialism by lamas even today, meaning: "Leave it as it is/it is just that." A second obvious way is to treat it as a Sanskrit expression, reading *svare* as locative of *svara* ("sound"): "in the unfabricated sound *om*" It is quite likely that the Karma pa would have been able to form words in Sanskrit, as he had studied Sanskrit

The strong term “impurities” (*dri ma*) denotes the meditation or insight achieved through empowerments, and is juxtaposed with the simple, effortless resting in the mind’s true nature—a classic example of the rhetoric of immediacy. In this case, the Karma pa sets the Great Seal of the Bka’ brgyud apart from the tantric empowerments and their practices. He emphasises the point with strong anti-ritualistic argumentation.⁶⁵

in the traditional Tibetan way (e.g. the *Kalāpasūtra*) with Zhwa lu Lo tsā ba Rin chen bkra shis (b. 15th century) and made his notes into a commentary (*Mkhas pa’i dga’ ston*, p. 1243, *Kam tshang*, p. 337; see also Rheingans 2008: 135). However, for two reasons this is not the only possibility. (i) This strand of the Great Seal is supposed to go back to Saraha and one should thus look at his material for an Indian reference to *om* as a synonym for the innate. The “unfabricated sound *om*” may then be an allusion to Saraha’s *Dohākoṣa* 90: “I know just a single syllable, but, friend, I don’t know its name” or 90a: “three unconditioned, one syllable (*yi ge gcig*)” (R. Jackson 2004: 104; Tib. Schaeffer 2000: 438; for the first mentioning of *yi ge gcig* with variant *ye shes cig*). The Tibetan commentators Bcom ldan Rig pa’i ral khri interprets *yi ge gcig* as the “letter of ultimate concern” (trans. Schaeffer 2000: 333) and to 90a he comments “the singular letter is the innate” (Schaeffer 2000: 391). Rig pa’i ral gri does not mention any specific syllable in his commentary. R. Jackson (ibid.) assumes the single syllable to be the “unstruck sound” (Skt. *anāhata*) or the famed syllable *a*. And one indeed wonders, why the Karma pa does not interpret it similarly if this is a Sanskrit expression alluding to the innate. Surely, further research has to be done in the area of Tibetan *dohā*-transmissions. (ii) In mantric endings, *svare* is often a prakritic generalised vocative and not a locative. In Vedic mantras that have a relation to tantra, *svare* may also be the dative-form of Skt. *svar* (= *svarga*).

⁶⁴ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Gling drung pa la ’dor ba’i dris lan*, fol. 2b: / ’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] / ye bzhugs nyid ye sangs rgyas su lhun gyis grub par ’char ba la ma bcos om sva re ’jog pa las /.

⁶⁵ Mathes (2006) has concluded that the Indian material by and on Saraha takes a sceptical stand towards “traditional forms of Buddhism including Tantra.” See also Schaeffer 2000: 7 and R. Jackson 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 going to ask for empowerment, ringing the bell, reciting [mantra] while meditating on a buddha aspect, and collecting tamarisk-wood and making fire offerings; or carrying out an [extensive] meditation ritual after having collected offering [substances].⁶⁶

The Karma pa had, however, not yet explicitly answered whether the fourth empowerment of the Sa skya pas or the Great Seal could be considered superior. This question is answered by recounting a story from the period of the twelfth-century masters, a story that also brings the text to an end.

When formerly the glorious Phag mo gru pa went into the presence of the Sa skya pa Kun [dga'] snying [po], [Phag mo gru pa] acted as local tutor (*gnas slob*)⁶⁷ for Khams pa Sbas mchod and [Phag mo gru pa] attended the

⁶⁶ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan*, fol. 3a: *de la dbang bskur zhur 'gro ba dang / dril bu 'khrol ba dang / lha bsgoms nas blas pa dang / yam shing bsags nas sbyin 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 /*.

⁶⁷ Zhang Yisun, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*: *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 gnang 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 to be the one who directly engages with the student in the dharma (ibid. fol. 191b). The question is (see the following note, below), whether we are dealing in the formal sense of the word with a teacher of the newcomer monk or instead with a senior teacher introducing a visiting monk to a monastery. *TSD*: *gnas byin pa – nīśrayadāyakaḥ*, from *Mahāvvyutpattiḥ*, 8731 (also *nīśrayadāpikāḥ*, *nīśrayadāpakāḥ*) “he that gives lodging.”

Bla ma [Sbas mchod] as not different from [Sa chen] Kun [dga'] snying [po].⁶⁸

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, 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:

⁶⁸ *sngon nas sa skya pa kun snying gi drung du dpal phag mo gru pa byon dus khams pa spas mchod la gnas kyi slob dpon mdzad / sa skya pa dang khyad med du bla mar bsten*. From the context I would read: “[Sa chen] made Spas mchod the *gnas slob* [for Phag mo gru pa].” 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 subject of the intransitive verb *byon*), acted as *gnas slob* for Sbas mchod, who is marked by the *la don*. 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 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 2007). It seems thus that Khams pa Sbas mchod acted as Phag mo gru pa's *gnas slob*; it means he acted as his personal preceptor, the senior monk who takes responsibility for a junior monk. This is grammatically elliptical (possible with adding a *du* = *slob dpon du*, thinking of the *la* for Sbas mchod as indicating the object = “[Sa chen] made Spas mchod the *gnas slob* [for Phag mo gru pa]” or “[Phag mo gru pa] made Sbas mchod [his] *gnas slob*”). As Phag mo gru pa had finished his Vinaya education by that time (1134; cf. Schiller 2002: 62), there is the possibility of a later addition to the story (see the following discussion in the main text).

“[You] must grant me the instruction that [made] you a buddha, the Great Seal.”

In answer [to that it says] in the *Giving of the Innate Union of the Great Seal* (*Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba*), 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 it if someone like you falls into a mistaken path, I must by all means offer⁶⁹ [you] the Great Seal—so please excuse me!”

[Phag gru] said [this], and in fact he even did something like confessing⁷⁰ [a misdeed].⁷¹

⁶⁹ 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.”

⁷⁰ *Mthol bshags*. Literally “to admit [mistakes]”; cf. Zhang Yisun, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*: *mthol bshags – rang gi nyes pa mi gsang bar shod pa* / “to declare one’s faults without concealing.”

⁷¹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa 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 spas 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 spas mchod khams su phyin / bder gshegs phag gru sangs rgyas pa'i skad khams su byung nas spas mchod kyis bder gshegs phag gru'i sku mdun du khyed sangs rgyas pa'i gdams ngag phyag rgya chen po de la* [read: *nga or: de nga la*] *gnang dgos zer nas phyag chen gyi gdams pa zhus pas / de'i lan du phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba bder gshegs phag gru pa'i bka' 'bum na yod pa de*

Thus, through a story that appears to be somewhat sectarian, the Karma pa gave his opinion about the main question. Part of this story may reflect the Karma pa's attitude toward Gling drung pa. Though we find comparatively strong language in the statement that the path Khams pa Sbas mchod has previously practised is a "mistaken path" (*lam log pa*), this is softened by a polite strand in the opening, as Phag mo gru pa evidently felt uncomfortable to teach his former tutor, apologising in the end.⁷²

Upon reading this passage, I am struck by some historical questions. 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 rhetorical feature of the Bka' brgyud pa *rnam thar* and played a role in the polemical exchange about the Great Seal.⁷³ But who was Khams pa Sbas mchod? Can the Karma pa'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 (1110–70), 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).⁷⁴ According to some sources, Phag mo gru pa was one of Sa chen's closest and most learned students, and

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] 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 mthol bshags lta bu'ang mdzad gda' pas /

⁷² One may speculate, too, as to whether the Karma pa felt a certain unease upon writing his reply and therefore ended it with this story and the comment that even Phag mo gru pa admitted a harmful action.

⁷³ Cf. Broido 1987 and D. Jackson 1990.

⁷⁴ 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. 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 of it (Stearns 2001: 16–26).

had played a major role in the earliest compilation of the *lam 'bras*.⁷⁵ The Sa skya pa sources tell us that he had spent approximately twelve years in Sa skya (probably 1138–50).⁷⁶

The figure of Khams pa Sbas mchod surfaces in the Bka' brgyud pa *nam thar* sources: it seems that Phag gru met a Dges bshes Dbas 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.⁷⁷ Only later is a Dbas

⁷⁵ 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 authored by Padma dkar po adds that he was Sa chen's most learned student; cf. Stearns 2001: 27, 180n133, 181n114. Davidson (2004: 308) doubts Phag mo gru pa's authorship of the *Dpe mdzod ma*, suggesting that the *Sga theng ma* (which Stearns considers to be authored by Phag mo gru pa, too) was handed down from Sa chen and has become the *Dpe mdzod ma*. According to Davidson (2004: 437n106), Stearns later communicated that he considers the *Sga theng ma* authentic and the original *Dpe mdzod ma* to be lost, replaced by the *Sga theng ma*.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 2001: 27, 180n113; Schiller 2002: 66.

⁷⁷ Schiller (2002: 59) has discussed various possible dates between 1127 and 1131. According to Rgyal thang pa, Phag gru accompanied Dges bshes Dbas chen po to Dbus when he was 29 years old (1138) (*Dkar brgyud gser 'phreng*, p. 401), whereas Schiller, using Chos kyi ye shes, translates that he accompanied a Dbas rdo rje chen po when he was 22 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 Dges 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 nam thar*, fol. 4af.). Most sources seem to agree that Phag gru took full ordination in 1134 in Zul phu (cf. Schiller 2002: 62). Later Phag mo gru pa went to Sa skya. But where was Dge bshes Dbas? That may lend credibility to the interpretation (see note 68 above), namely that Phag gru might 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

mchod mentioned among the close students of Phag gru, the only time where the same name is used as in the *dris lan* (albeit with a different variant for Sbas).⁷⁸

A search for the eighth Karma pa's alleged source may help to shed light on some of the issues: the *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba* is said to have existed in the *gsung 'bum* of Phag mo gru pa but did not enter into any of the published versions or available early *dkar chags*, nor do we find the story among related works on *lhan cig skyes sbyor*.⁷⁹ But in another section of Phag mo gru pa's *bka' 'bum* there are three letters or works of advice to a Dge bshes Spas, also called Spas Dge bshes Byang chub brtson 'grus.⁸⁰ The Karma pa's *dris lan* had introduced Khams pa Spas mchod as someone Phag mo gru pa had the same trust in as he did in Sa chen (*dad pa mnyam po*). Phag gru

that he had the same trust in the Sa skya pa as in Dbas? Are we dealing with the same person?

⁷⁸ Schiller 2002: 87, who refers to Dpal chen chos kyi ye shes, *Chos rje rin po che'i rnam thar*, fol. 24a. Dbas is an alternative spelling of Sbas (see note 85 below).

⁷⁹ During his current 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 16th century manuscript from 'Bri gung (*Phag gru MS*), the *lhan cig skyes 'byor* 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, pp. 255–351.

⁸⁰ The *Spas dge bshes byang chub brtson 'grus la phag gru pas gdams pa* (*Phag gru MS: Dge bshes dbas chen po la [gdams pa]*, vol. 3, fol. 333b–334b) is most likely addressed to the same person as Khams pa Sbas mchod. The *Byang chub brtson 'grus la springs pa'i nyams myong gnyis pa* (*Phag gru MS: 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 MS: Sbas la bskur yig*, vol. 3, fol. 274b–274b) does not contain any concrete hint but could have been directed to the same individual.

uses similar phrases in the instruction to Spas Dge bshes Byang chub brtson 'grus (in the earlier *Phag gru MS* referred to as Sbas Dge bshes chen po): Phag gru mentions that previously this lama has cared for him kindly and he excuses himself, saying that his devotion towards Sa skya pa and him would be the same (*bla ma sa skya pa dang khyed bzhugs pa la mos gus mnyam par mchis*), and indicates that this Dge bshes had formerly acted as his teacher.⁸¹ The second work also hints at a similar relationship: the work is termed the instruction Phag gru gave to a former dharma friend (*mched grogs*), the Dges bshes Dbas chen po.⁸² Both works 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 Karma pa has not been found, these texts and the *nam thar* indicate at least the existence of a Dge bshes Spas who was Phag gru's teacher before he met Sgam po pa. The Dbas dge bshes chen po mentioned in the instruction⁸³ most likely refers to the very Khams pa Spas/Sbas mchod from the *dris lan*, who, as his name suggests, probably came from Khams and belonged to the Spas clan,⁸⁴ as did Phag gru himself.⁸⁵ The issue concerning the *gnas slob*, however, remains obscure and may indeed be a later addition to the story.

⁸¹ Phag mo gru Rdo rje rgyal po, *Spas dge bshes byang chub brtson 'grus*, p. 718.

⁸² Phag mo gru Rdo rje rgyal po, *Byang chub brtson 'grus la springs pa*, p. 381.

⁸³ Phag mo gru Rdo rje rgyal po, *Spas dge bshes byang chub brtson 'grus*, p. 718.

⁸⁴ A fifteenth-century encyclopaedia notes that Spas (variants: Sba, Rba, Sbas, Dbas) 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).

⁸⁵ It remains to be clarified what exactly their relationship was (for example what the Karma pa 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 as Dges bshes Dbas *alias* Khams pa Dbas mchod. To date I have not examined the sources on Sa chen's life in

Given the evidence above, it is unlikely that the Karma pa himself imagined a text called *Phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gnang ba* without any literary source.⁸⁶ It stills puzzles me as to whether the Karma pa 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 phrased it freely.⁸⁷ As is still typical in the field of Tibetan studies, many sources have yet to become available.⁸⁸

4 Concluding Reflections

Though some context remains to be clarified, this *dris lan* bears testimony to how the Karma pa approached a polemically loaded Great Seal question addressed to him by a student with probably a Ngor pa-Sa skya pa background. Thus, the work presents an historical window onto some of the religious and political circumstances of the teaching of Great Seal doctrines in this period and the ensuing tensions: the ambivalence of an enquirer who was probably

detail. C. Stearns (e-mail communication, Sept. 2006) has not come across this name yet.

⁸⁶ After all, this was a written answer by a well-informed scholar, who clearly states the title and source. Mi bskyod rdo rje was also familiar with works of other masters of that period, for example Bla ma Zhang. The Karma pa transmitted the reading transmission (*lung*) of Zhang's *bka' 'bum* (Si tu and 'Be lo, *Kam tshang*, p. 339).

⁸⁷ Of course there is also always the possibility that the Karma pa's *dris lan* has undergone some editing.

⁸⁸ 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 at 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 my unpublished MA thesis, Rheingans 2004. Unfortunately his *gsung 'bum* is not complete (for a catalogue see *ibid.* 143–95) and remarks about a Khams pa Sbas mchod could not yet be found in the available material.

devoted to two traditions;⁸⁹ his question, which almost presupposes the answer; and the anecdote within the *dris lan*, which—albeit in a sectarian manner—is utilised by the Karma pa to underline his opinion without expressing it directly.⁹⁰

Doctrinally, the *dris lan* first distinguishes the tantras as mundane and supramundane, an important point to be followed up in further research. Mi bskyod rdo rje then puts forward the Great Seal as a teaching impossible to call “either the same as or different from” the tantras, a feature emphasising its method as going beyond tantric ritual. Mi bskyod rdo rje does not offer an argument here (as he does elsewhere)⁹¹ or clearly state a path for Great Seal practice, apart from telling the student to let the mind rest without artifice (*ma bcos*). In that, the teaching style resembles that of the Karma pa’s dialogues in the *rnam thar*, briefly depicted above.⁹² He does not further label his 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

⁸⁹ 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 his disproportionate influence is also reported to have caused some unease among the Sa skya pas in Gtsang (cf. Sangs rgyas Dpal sgrub, *Rgyal ba spyen ras gzigs*, fol. 38b).

⁹⁰ As in a narrative text, which works with either *showing* (by means of metaphor, images, etc.) or *telling* (directly relating its message); see Cobley 2001: 19.

⁹¹ For example in the *Glo bur gyi dri ma* and also the *Dpal ldan dwags po bka’ brgyud kyī gsung*; not to mention his debates in the *Dwags*. In fact, his argumentative strategy is a topic on its own. For a later evaluation of the Karma pa’s doctrines, see also Rheingans 2008: 217–44; 2009; and forthcoming.

⁹² 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, Karma pa 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 that of the explanatory tradition (*bshad srol*) of the general Secret Mantra, this being the special feature of Nāropa and Maitrī.

‘path of direct cognition’ by Sgam po pa or ‘essence Great Seal’ in the later categorisations of Kong sprul Blo gro mtha’ yas and Bkra shis chos ’phel.⁹³ In a spiritual autobiography (*rang nam*) the eighth Karma pa is quoted as remarking that when teaching he in particular emphasized the Great Seal traditions of Jo bo Mitrayogin and of the *dohās* transmitted in India via Vajrapāṇi.⁹⁴ Does this mention of the *dohās* refer to the kind of instruction in the *dris lan*?⁹⁵

⁹³ Saraha has pointed out the possibility of realisation by merely relying on the kindness of one’s guru (Mathes in the present volume; R. Jackson 2004: 37–40), and we find the idea of a third path with Sgam po pa (Sherpa 2004: 130; D. Jackson 1994: 25–28). The 19th century scholars Kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas and Karma Bkra shis chos ’phel have used this categorisation for the Great Seal that leads to the spontaneous realisation of the nature of one’s mind. (Mathes 2006: 1 and Mathes in the present volume).

⁹⁴ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII, *Byang phyogs ’di na karma pa*, fol. 9b. It outlines the texts that the eighth Karma pa wrote up to his 44th year (fol.4a– fol.9b). For how he directly expounded (*bshad*) on these texts, see fol. 9b–10a. The other Great Seal teachings listed are Karma, ’Brug pa, ’Ba rom pa, ’Bri gung, Mtshal pa, Smar pa, and Khro phu.

⁹⁵ Mi bskyod rdo rje considers the teaching on the *dohās* as transmitted by Vajrapāṇi of India and A su of Nepal as one of three approaches to Maitrīpa’s *amanasikāra-madhyamaka*, calling it *alīkakāra-cittamātra-madhyamaka* (Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dwags*, fol. 6a.). Mi bskyod rdo rje was certainly well acquainted with the collection of Indian Great Seal works compiled by the Seventh Karma pa (the *Rgya gzhung*) and had also studied under Karma ’Phrin las pa (1456–1539), who commented on Saraha’s *dohā*-cycles. Karma ’Phrin las pa studied the *dohās* under the Seventh Karma pa and the Ras chung Snyan rgyud master Khrul zhig Sangs rgyas bsam grub (15th century) before authoring his commentary (for Karma ’phrin las pa’s studies and teaching of 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 Karma pa—albeit quoting Saraha frequently—did not compose a formal commentary on any of the *dohās*.

“Great Seal” is used differently in the *dris lan* than in the aforementioned *Phyag rgya chen po'i byin rlabs kyi ngos 'dzin*, where it clearly designates mantric practices and their result, pointing to the various angles of explication (not uncommon for other masters, too). In the *Glo bur gyi dri ma* presented above, we have seen a more argumentative and elaborate approach, which basically emphasises the need to avoid any kind of fabrication or clinging in meditation. What has also become obvious from even the small number of works examined is the heated atmosphere, as reflected in the need to defend oneself from the critics.

It should be remembered that the *dris lan* and also many other minor instructions were marginal works taught to particular individuals, and thus may not reflect a standard view. This article is thus a preliminary step towards coming to terms with just a few of the complex sources, personalities, and transmissions involved. Only future research into the eighth Karma pa's life and works will determine how much his doctrinal presentations depended on the context of the addressee, and how much on considerations of genre and historical circumstance.⁹⁶

It is difficult to come to terms historically with Saraha, let alone find a coherent system in his teaching.⁹⁷ It has also been noted of Sgam po pa's Great Seal that he was far from presenting a uniform system, and in Sgam po pa's case that most of his works were not written by him.⁹⁸ For the eighth Karma pa,

⁹⁶ One would need in the future to thoroughly study the Karma pa's teaching in all minor commentaries and instructions (such as *khrid*, *man ngag*, *gdams ngag*, and *bslab bya*), comparing it with his statements in the larger treatises—especially his *Dgongs gcig* and *Sku gsum ngo sprod* volumes. We also are in need of an exhaustive study of his life in historical context.

⁹⁷ Cf. R. Jackson 2004: 3–53; Braitstein 2004: 16–39.

⁹⁸ Cf. D. Jackson 1994: 10n17; Kragh 2006. In Sgam po pa's case the first blocks were carved in 1520, 367 years after his death in 1153. In the case of the eighth Karma pa, however, the compilation of a manuscript collection was undertaken immediately after his death.

however, manifold contemporaneous material is at hand and the authorship is clearer,⁹⁹ as indicated by early *dkar chags* and title lists. This allows various avenues of research, a few of which have been pointed out in this essay. One future line of research will certainly be his contribution to the systematisations of the Ninth Karma pa and Bkra shis rnam rgyal (1513–87).¹⁰⁰ Though still a hypothesis, it seems that the eighth Karma pa was less systematic than his successors but at times very scholastic in his shorter instructions. But did he, through his commentaries, his founding of institutes, and his political impact, prepare the ground for these later approaches to the Great Seal? It will be fruitful to try to investigate these matters by taking into account as much as possible the textual genres involved, the concrete teaching situations, and the identities of the persons addressed.

⁹⁹ For the concept of authorship in medieval Tibet, see Cabezón 2000.

¹⁰⁰ See Kapstein 2006: 58–60, on the systematisation of the siddhas' teachings in Tibet. See also Sobisch 2003 on the meditation manuals (*khrid yig*) of the fivefold Great Seal of the 'Bri gung pa.

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