

3. Karma 'phrin las pa: Life and Impact

The previous chapters have discussed the textual sources and methodologies and also clarified which masters bore the title “Karma 'phrin las pa” in Tibetan history. After discussing some necessary political context, this chapter seeks to portray significant episodes of the First Karma 'phrin las pa's career and impact as seen from the main spiritual biographies, but also further sources as analysed above, in Chapter One. My research is partly constrained by the previously mentioned nature of the texts. Since the biographical sources are not written in a detailed chronological sequence, it was not advisable to consider all events according to a strictly linear timeline. Hence, while still attempting to arrange a basic chronological order, the subject was also treated topically, focussing on meaningful phases of studies, masters, and places of activity. If an event was deemed historically significant and if documentation was available, some interpretation is offered. For a better understanding, sources ascribed to Karma 'phrin las pa such as his songs are occasionally cited. The reader can gain an impression of the narrative structure of two main spiritual biographies from their translations as presented below, in Chapter Five, whereas the outline of the spiritual biography by Nam mkha' lha dbang was provided in Chapter One.¹³⁰ A tabular overview of key events of Karma 'phrin las pa's life is given below, in Appendix A.

3.1 The Political Background

Here let me briefly sketch some of the complicated religiopolitical context of that period, which has still not been researched extensively, even though there is a slowly growing body of academic studies, among the most detailed with a political focus being Everding's (2000) major work on Mang yul gung thang, Sørensen and Hazod (2007), or Olaf Czaja's (2013) monumental study of the Rlang Phag mo gru pa.¹³¹ Papers in Caumanns and Sernesi (2017) contain different important aspects and Jackson (1989) has thoroughly investigated the issues in Central Tibet surrounding Nälendra. While I had presented a brief Karma bKa' brgyud-focused overview for my monograph on the Eighth Karmapa (2017),¹³² to provide some context again is vital for understanding Karma 'phrin las pa's life, and in his case, we need a

¹³⁰ When I refer to the passages about Karma 'phrin las pa from the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* or the *History of the Karma bKa'-brgyud-pa Sect* which are edited in Chapter Five and translated in Chapter Six below, I simply add “(Chapters Five and Six)” after the reference, so that the reader can consult the full text and translation presented. I only quote the Tibetan in Chapter Three when needed for immediate comparison.

¹³¹ This section should merely provide some relevant context, and the reader is kindly asked to forgive me for sometimes using summarising works such as Shakabpa (1984) or Kapstein (2006), which are nonetheless excellent for the aim of this section. Czaja (2013) offers the most comprehensive study of the Phag mo gru pa family so important for this period, while Jackson (1989) provides a detailed analysis of the issues in Central Tibet with a focus on Nälendra. Tucci (1980), Shakabpa (1984) and Kapstein (2006) each offer very well-informed overviews. For further literature on the late 15th and early 16th centuries, also see the following studies of religious and political figures as well as families and religious sites: Ehrhard (2002a), (2004), (2010), (2012), and (2013); Everding (2000), Sørensen and Hazod (2007), Larsson (2009), Caumanns (2015), Rheingans (2017), Heimbel (2017), and the various contributions in Caumanns and Sernesi (2018) along with Sernesi (forthcoming). Some of the issues deserve thorough research and presentation in the form of a paper.

¹³² Rheingans (2017), pp. 36–42.

slightly different and updated digest of information. I shall additionally elaborate on specific aspects of these developments in the sections under 3.10 below.

Karma 'phrin las pa lived at a time of political turmoil characterised by constant clashes between dBus and gTsang, and within each province. Tibetan history from 1354 to 1642 is sometimes described as the period of three major post Sa skya hegemonies during which three families successively dominated dBus and gTsang, namely the Phag mo gru pa, the Rin spungs pa and the gTsang sDe srid family. It began in 1354, when ruling power was seized by the ambitious Tai Situ Byang chub rgyal mtshan (Phag mo gru), a rebellious Sa skya district administrator who made use of the decline of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, thus ending the primacy of the Sa skya pas under the Mongolian patronage.¹³³

The Phag mo gru hierarchs ruled from sNe'u gdong in lHo kha, in southern dBus province. Beside their bKa' brgyud pa affiliations, later rulers from this family were also impressed by Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) and his disciples. In the year 1409, Tsong kha pa first initiated the great yearly wishing prayer (*smon lam chen mo*) and founded the monastery dGa' ldan. His disciples had further monasteries built: 'Bras spungs (1416) and Se ra (1419), both in the vicinity of the spiritually powerful Lhasa-region, which had been the domain of other orders. The dGe lugs monastic complex of bKra shis lhun po was founded in 1447 at Shigatse in central gTsang province by dGe 'dun grub (1391–1474). While the system of reincarnation had likely originated with the Third Karmapa (1284–1339), during the course of the 16th century, the dGe lugs order strongly established the tulku system, which ultimately became a form of government during the so-called dGa' ldan pho brang reign from the mid 17th century. Hence, the 16th century also saw the growth of reincarnate lama lineages, and with it, the gradual creation of a new influential upper level of society.¹³⁴

3.1.1 The Rin spungs pa Assuming Control of Lhasa

The Phag mo gru family's rule was gradually overthrown 130 years later by their own ministers, the Rin spungs pa—who over many decades (in the 1480s and 1490s) gradually transformed their nominal masters, the Phag mo gru pa's *gong ma*, into no more than just puppets. Troubles started fifty years earlier, when the ruling Phag mo dru pa head Gong ma Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1385–1432) died. After several disputes concerning succession, the power was grasped by the Rin spung's duke Don grub rdo rje (b. 1447), who conquered Shigatse and settled his capital there, much increasing the power of his family.¹³⁵ The detail of the following events and local skirmishes certainly needs further exploration. Shakabpa, though in some respects outdated, summarises the complex situation well for the purpose of this study:

The minister, Rinpung Norzang, died in 1466 and his youngest brother, Tsokye Dorje, became the next minister with the help of his powerful relatives. He tried to remain neutral in the

¹³³ For a detailed study, see the extensive chapter on the rise of the Phag mo gru pa in Czaja (2013), pp. 109–204.

¹³⁴ Schwieger (2015), p. 30 (cf. Wylie 1978); for the early development, see Schwieger (2015), pp. 17–3; for the culmination of the tulku in the Fifth Dalai Lama and the struggle for Buddhist government afterwards, see *ibid.*, pp. 50–111.

¹³⁵ For the Rin spungs pa and their dates, also see the account in Czaja (2013), pp. 485–488.

dispute; but minor disturbances created by the Nedong group, caused him to support the Rinpung faction.

Donyo Dorje, the son of Rinpung Norzang, wanted to build a monastery in Lhasa on behalf of the Kar-ma-pa sect; but the Lhasa administrator, who supported the Ge-lug-pa sect, refused him permission. The monastery was then built outside of Lhasa and Palkhang Chozay put in charge; but monks from the neighbouring Ge-lug-pa monasteries descended on it one night and razed it. A Karmapa Lama, Chodrak Gyatso, narrowly escaped being killed. He took refuge in Lhasa.

Donyo Dorje, who had become the leader of the Rinpung faction at Shigatse, led troops in a retaliation strike against the province of Ü and captured several small districts under the jurisdiction of the Lhasa administrator. Then he marched onto Nedong, where he removed from office the deputy minister, Konchok Rinchen, who had been his father's rival.

In the Iron-Ox year (1481) an attack by Donyo Dorje against the Lhasa area itself was unsuccessful. In the same year, all the ministers converged on Nedong to discuss the dispute that had arisen between the Gongma's supporters and the Rinpung family. As a result of the discussion, Gongma Kunga Legpa was dethroned and compensated with an estate; his more troublesome relatives were not allowed to remain at Nedong. Chen-nga Tsenyepa, a young cousin of the Gongma, was placed on the throne and, in a reversal of prior practice, was allowed to marry.

The most influential ministers were those from Rinpung and, as their power was predominant in both Ü and Tsang, the Phamo Drupa Gongma was a mere figurehead. In 1485, Rinpung forces attacked a district, Gyantse, whose administrators were Nedong ministers; but the latter found an ally in the Lhasa administrator, and the Rinpung were defeated.

Three years later, as a result of internal disputes within the ruling circle of Gyantse district, Rinpung troops again attacked and this time captured Gyantse. Then, in 1491, the young Gongma died and a council of ministers ruled at Nedong for a few months until Tsokye Dorje, Rinpung Norzang's youngest brother, took over as regent.

In 1492 Donyo Dorje again invaded Ü, seizing three districts. Years later, in 1498, a prominent citizen of Lhasa, Depa Nangtse, along with his uncle and nephew, were executed on orders from the Lhasa administrator. Using that event as an excuse, Donyo Dorje attacked and captured Lhasa and dismissed the administrator from office. Rinpung forces took over the Lhasa region and remained there until 1517, when they were finally driven out. During that period, the monks of the Drepung and Sera monasteries were not permitted to attend the Monlam festival in Lhasa, because Donyo Dorje was a supporter of the Kar-ma-pa sect.¹³⁶

After unsuccessful attacks on Lhasa in 1481, in 1498 the Rinpung rulers effectively established their power over Lhasa and until 1517 controlled large parts of dBu and gTsang, while their general Don yod rdo rje (1463–1512), a supporter of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa and the Seventh Karmapa (1454–1506), was the most powerful figure of the day.¹³⁷

Sørensen and Hazod and the recent study by Czaja have added substantial insights and detailed information.¹³⁸ However, it would be helpful to make further investigation of some of the potential causes for such deep resentment already hinted at by Shakabpa, which can only be indicated here. As mentioned, Don yod rdo rje had previously (in the late 1480s?)

¹³⁶ Shakabpa (1984), pp. 87–88.

¹³⁷ Cf. Sørensen and Hazod (2007), pp. 500–504.

¹³⁸ See particularly Czaja (2013), pp. 249–266 and Sørensen and Hazod (2007), Appendix II.

tried to build a Karma bKa' brgyud monastery near Lhasa. When the sNel pa lord (also see the following sections below) refused permission, he went ahead and built a monastery outside Lhasa. As far as can be ascertained now, this is *not* the Thub chen monastery founded later in between 1503 and 1506, but the mention of dPal khang chos mdzad as its head is suspicious.¹³⁹ Be that as it may, the site was allegedly descended upon by dGe lugs monks from nearby, and in Shakabpa's words: "A Karmapa Lama, Chos grags rgya mtsho, narrowly escaped being killed. He took refuge in Lhasa." Although Shakabpa's account might not contain all details, this infamous attack has been overlooked by most Western historians apart from remarks by David Jackson and Sørensen and Hazod.¹⁴⁰

An important passage from Si tu and 'Be lo's spiritual biography of the Seventh Karmapa provides further context (translated by Shamar Mipham Chökyi Lodrö 1952–2014, one of the 20th century Tibetan masters who took an interest in history). The Karmapa reportedly had three successive dreams in which Buddha Maitreya urged him to install Vinaya-abiding monks in the surroundings of the Jo khang to help prevent the decline of the Buddhadharma and ensure its re-blossoming. The text then reads:

The Jokhang area where the temple was located belonged to the Zhika Nelpa family who were the sponsors of the Karmapa. Therefore, the Seventh Karmapa asked them to do this (build the monk's quarters). But, due to the influence of others, Zhika Nelpa could not fulfill the request. Karmapa also could not build the residence for the monks (around the Jokhang Temple).

But he (the Seventh Karmapa) already owned a monk residence at Karma Dratshang near the Jokhang (area). He decided to expand those quarters to house Vinaya-observing monks in order not to ignore the prediction of Maitreya.

However, when the construction was underway, those people who wore monk's robes but actually intended to collect riches were overwhelmed by evil. They united with family-holders (lay supporters of Gelug). The genuine (or pure) monks of Sera and Drepung were powerless to stop them. Numbering about five hundred, the aggressors were armed and wore helmets. Those without helmets used their begging bowls for protection. They destroyed all the constructions.

¹³⁹ I consider the founding of Thub chen now clarified as having taken place between 1503 and 1506 (often the starting date is only given as the pig year 1503), see especially section 3.10.2 below (contrary to what I had assumed in Rheingans 2017, p. 39). As shown in Chapter Two (2.2), dPal khang Chos mdzad was a name for the Second Karma 'phrin las pa (and presumably lived later from around 1520–1600) and could have been easily confused by Shakabpa for the First Karma 'phrin las pa. But we cannot say with certitude that Karma 'phrin las pa was not also involved in the earlier event (if it actually was in the 1470s or 1480s), as the dates for these incidents do not appear fully confirmed to me. It is clear, however, that Karma 'phrin las pa met the Seventh Karmapa only in 1487.

¹⁴⁰ Jackson (1989), p. 49, n. 64 and Sørensen and Hazod (2007), pp. 489–499. Regarding the issue of the exact dating of this event as well as the following fights: In the passage about the Seventh Karmapa, the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* refers to the Jo khang incident from pp. 1078–1081, explaining points including correspondence with the Bya khrid dpon as well as the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa. There is no clear chronology that can be easily determined here, but that same text includes the Karmapa meeting Karma 'phrin las pa in a previous passage (p. 1076), which we can safely place in 1487 with the *rNam par thar pa ngo mtshar yid kyi shing rta*, fol. 12r (see section 3.7.2 below). We could thus assume a proximity in time. However, the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* pp. 1078–1081 mostly reports a correspondence, so we cannot rely on the placing in the narrative; a dedicated investigation is needed.

About two thousand of (the Seventh) Karmapa's followers were gathered there with weapons offered by the people. They were enough to defend against five hundred monks who launched the attack. They asked Karmapa for permission to fight back in self-defence. He said to them, "If we are genuine followers of the Buddha, then we will never commit such acts. If you are my genuine devotees, stop (don't do anything)."

Later, the government under the Fourth Shamarpa (while the king was still a minor) as well as many lords, such as Lord Jaba Thripon, all said (the attacking monks) must be punished because they had destabilized the jurisdiction or area. The waging of war by monks was disgraceful. But Karmapa forcefully stopped them (the government officials and lords), and so they were very upset.¹⁴¹

This passage stems from a spiritual biography within the *History of the Karma bKa'-brgyud-pa Sect* written in the late 18th century (at many points based on earlier sources). While we must be critical of information conveyed through this genre, we should certainly take such accounts into consideration (not to mention that other researchers, too, in the absence of an abundance of sources, heavily rely on this text and the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*).¹⁴² Shamar Rinpoche also briefly recounts that, until then, dGe lugs pa and bKa' bryud pa had enjoyed a comparatively good rapport in Central Tibet, which, after its deterioration was partly healed by the Eighth Karmapa, a point to which I would add that his times, too, were politically uneasy.¹⁴³

The above means that the Phag mo gru pa government with the advice of Zhwa dmar (who was installed later in 1493 as the Phag mo gru pa *spyang snga*, the highest religious authority) and many other disciples (including strongman Rin spungs Don yod rdo rje and ICags mo 'Od zer ba) considered the attack on the Karma pa to be the greatest of outrages, and they pressed for suitable retaliation, but the Karmapa forbade it. This affront provoked a deep and lasting grudge in the Bya pa khri dpon, a follower of the Karmapa.¹⁴⁴

We are also informed that, in 1498, the Lhasa *sde pa* (Lhasa was overseen by the sNel pa/sNe'u pa estate) inflamed the situation again by murdering the Lhasa citizen Nang rtse *sde pa* together with his uncle and nephew.¹⁴⁵ The Bya pa khri dpon, who normally was allied in military conflicts with the sNel pa lords, had already been offended by the previous threatening of the Karmapa. Now, twenty years later, he broke away from the Yar/Gong

¹⁴¹ Shamar Rinpoche (2012), pp. 8–9, quoting *History of the Karma bKa'-brgyud-pa Sect*, vol. I, pp. 559–560.

¹⁴² See Chapter One (1.2) and Chapter Five for a more detailed discussion of those two sources.

¹⁴³ Shamar Rinpoche (2012), pp. 8. Sectarian strife was practiced on various sides. As I have shown in my research about the Eighth Karmapa, he had inherited a politically challenging situation and balanced the various powers to be, achieving a relatively secure position for his school in Eastern Tibet as well as in dBus and gTsang. His biographers and he himself were wary of the ongoing outbreaks and sectarian strife, see my summarising analysis in Rheingans (2017), pp. 111–115.

¹⁴⁴ Though no extensive investigation can be provided here, as was mentioned, a passage about the correspondence with the Bya khrid dpon is found in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*; towards its end, his outrage and the consequences of the event are explained: p. 1080: *bya pa khrid dpon ni khyed bstan pa'i bdag po rnam bstan pa mi srung na nge tsho 'dra nyan rang du bzugs kyang bla zer ba'i thugs chad mtha' yas par mdzad/ phyis bya pa khrid dpon gyis 'di thugs la mnags pa kho nas yar gong snel gsum dang srid bshig ste gstang srid mdzad nas skyi shod du khri dmag gnyis* [p. 1081] *gsum bteg pa'i tshang drung rtse lha sgang na bzugs*. As was said, the whole passage needs to be explored in context.

¹⁴⁵ Sørensen and Hazod (2007), p. 502, suggest that the Nang rtse *sde pa*, a small ruling house from nearby sTod lung valley, had ambitions to oust the sNel pa as local rulers of Lhasa.

dkar/sNel pa alliance and felt impelled to join the armies massed by the Rin spungs pas, leading to their huge victory of 1498, which removed the sNel pa as local rulers and also set the Rin spungs pa as undisputed rulers of both dBus and gTsang.¹⁴⁶

During their direct rule over the Lhasa region, in 1503, Don yod rdo rje then commanded the construction of the Zhwa dmar pa's Yangs pa can monastery (situated north of Lhasa).¹⁴⁷ The abovementioned Karmapa-monastery, Thub chen chos' khor, was built between 1503 and 1506, with both the Seventh Karmapa and Karma 'phrin las pa involved. Since my main hagiographical source by Nam mkha' lha dbang depicts its founding in some detail, this study contributes information about its beginning (see section 3.10.2 below). Furthermore, harsh measures were put into place, in that the dGe lugs pa monks from the three central seats were banned from their yearly Great Prayer Festival. The religious hierarchs involved are credited with different roles, and based on the evidence available to date, we can assume that geopolitical issues were at the heart of the matter and not finer points of Buddhist doctrine.¹⁴⁸ And while Czaja has done research towards a more complete historical analysis of the events, further explorations such as in-depth studies of both the Seventh Karmapa and the Fourth Zhwa dmar are needed,¹⁴⁹ not to mention additional investigations of specific events, local histories of affected fiefdoms, and monastic sites involved.

Kapstein points out:

Although the issues will only be settled through further research, the available evidence does suggest that politics and not doctrine was at the heart of the dispute. For there is little to suggest that sectarian rivalry had itself grown so sharp prior to the events in question; the great enmity which would only intensify during the centuries that followed, seems to have been an outcome, rather than the cause of events of 1498 and after. (...) For reasons quite unconnected to Buddhist doctrine and philosophy, therefore, the Rinpungpa found it in their interests to check Gelugpa power in the Lhasa area. Gendün Gyatso, who reestablished Gelugpa leadership at the Great Prayer Festival after Pakmodrupa had begun to reassert themselves during the first decades of the sixteenth century, discussing these events in his memoirs, notably avoids any direct reference to sectarian antagonism and instead depicts the relevant authority as having rested squarely with the political powers.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Sørensen and Hazod (2007), p. 502; Jackson (1989), p. 18; Jackson, e-mail communication, 20 July 2020. Sørensen and Hazod (2007), p. 501, n. 167 (which then makes up p. 502), also elaborate on the puzzling issue of the contentious relationship between the Rin spungs pa and the sNel pa, who had originally both been fiefdoms under the Phag mo gru pa and stemmed from (different branches of) the dGyer lineage.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Jackson (1989), p.29; Czaja (2013), p. 245, using the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1145.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Kapstein (2006), p. 129.

¹⁴⁹ For the events after 1500, also see the summary in Czaja (2013), pp. 245–266, who concludes as applicable from his sources to what extent the Zhwa dmar pa was involved. Yet, as no focussed and thorough study of this Zhwa dmar hierarch on the basis of Tibetan sources has emerged, we should take assertions with some caution. dGe lugs historians such as Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor believe that he was the influential instigator of the 1481 invasion—the biography of the Zhwa dmar pa credits him with a diplomatic role. See Jackson (1989), p.47, note 61. In the absence of major research about the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa and the Seventh Karmapa on the basis of *all* available Tibetan sources in context of these complex events, attributes such as “politically ambitious” should be avoided when not supported by evidence. I shall look forward to the doctoral dissertation by Kamilla Mojzes (University of Bonn) on this topic.

¹⁵⁰ Kapstein (2006), p. 130.

It was in 1518 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), later referred to as the Second Dalai Lama, who enjoyed the backing of the temporarily resurging Phag mo gru pa under ruler Ngad dbang bKra shis grags pa. dGe 'dun rgya mtsho then used this ruler's funding for his residence at 'Bras spungs, dGa' ldan pho brang, a name which would later become synonymous with the Tibetan government. Schwieger has pointed out that, despite the reasons being political, “with the Fourth Zhamarpa and the Second Dalai Lama, we see for the first time two prominent *trülkus* on different sides of a political power play.”¹⁵¹

3.1.2 Karma phrin pas pa's Monastery Nälendra Attacked by dGe lugs Fanatics in 1489

The violent outbreaks during these times also affected the monastic seat of Sa skya pa learning Nälendra, in which Karma 'phrin las pa's uncle Dwags po bKra shis nam rgyal (1399–1458) and he himself acted as abbots (see sections 3.3, 3.6.1, and 3.10.6 below). A growing dGe lugs pa fanaticism in the 1480s and 1490s was one of the key factors in the background of Karma 'phrin las pa's life, although he had personally been a respectful student of a great dGe lugs pa lama, dGe 'dun grub, who would posthumously be endowed with the title of First Dalai Lama and who was one of the more broad-minded representatives of his order (see section 3.5 below). In his study of Nälendra, Jackson has investigated these events with the aid of a number of sources and he has kindly provided an up-to-date summary from his ongoing work on Nälendra for the purpose of this study:

In winter of 1489, Karma 'phrin las pa's own home Sakyapa monastery was attacked by a mob of fanatics from dGa' ldan monastery, who during their attack tried to cause enough damage that the temple would be abandoned (see Jackson 1989, p. 18). This infamous episode was “spiritually” led and inspired by the fanatic 10th abbot of dGa' ldan, sMon lam dpal, who for a while was abbot of both dGa' ldan and 'Bras spungs. After that physical attack on Nälendra, he openly continued to perform rites of harmful magic, even after stepping down from the abbacy the next year. The threats that the evil abbot posed only ended about two years later, when he died in winter of 1491/92 when, during a sudden violent lightning storm, something like a meteor struck his residence, killing him and several of his accomplices.¹⁵²

Jackson assumes that Karma 'phrin las pa's own abbatial residence at Nälendra, the “abbot's residence college” (*gzims khang grwa tshang*), was not the main target of attack and may have survived a little better than some other parts, since its founder Dwags po bKra shis nam rgyal was a respectful disciple of Tsong kha pa.¹⁵³ With the main instigator no longer alive, one might have expected fewer open attacks in the mid 1490s, but in the later 1490s troubles erupted again, caused by the tense situation in Lhasa and Central Tibet that was depicted above.

The political and sectarian situation changed dramatically in 1642 when the Fifth Dalai Lama became head of a dGe lugs pa–controlled and a dGe lugs pa–favouring theocratic government with the military aid of Mongolian forces. The Fifth Dalai Lama developed his

¹⁵¹ Schwieger (2015), p. 29.

¹⁵² David Jackson, e-mail communication, 20 July 2020. For a detailed account, see Jackson (1989), pp. 18–27.

¹⁵³ On Dwags po bkra shis nam rgyal's life, see Jackson (1989), pp. 9–10. Jackson describes him as a master of both sūtra and tantra while he had a non-sectarian approach to the Buddhadharmā. He is especially renowned for his mastery of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*.

own distinct vision of the union of religion and politics. From the late 15th to the early 17th century (that is, the Rin spungs pa and gTsang sDe srid periods), however, the Karma bKa' brgyud pa were quite influential in Central Tibet and remained so in Khams.

The main point here is that from the late 1470s to the 1490s (and to maybe a lesser degree in the first decades of the 16th century), Central Tibet was shaken by fierce sectarianism. This presented an insecure environment for the peaceful flourishing of the meditative traditions as undertaken by what this study indicates was such a sincere practitioner as Karma 'phrin las pa. These decades were also the central years of his religious activity. As a noble son from southern Tibetan Dwags po sKu rab with—as is shown in this chapter—close relations to key players and monastic sites affected during that period, he certainly heard or indirectly witnessed some of the various local events happening around him. But with just one mention of a “civil war” (*bde gzar*) in 1472 and the allusion to the possibility of war with lJang sa tham, the spiritual biographies depict such matters only in passing. Similarly, the spiritual biography of his uncle mNyam nyid rdo rje merely mentions one case of infighting in sKu rab, Karma 'phrin las pa's home region.¹⁵⁴ On the one hand, this is typical of this text type with its main aim to portray a holy person's religious life. On the other hand, the hagiographies of other hierarchs by the same authors Si tu and 'Be lo (such as with the Seventh Karmapa as quoted above) do sometimes contain such details, despite their overall religious goal. With some probability, this might serve as an indication of the perceived insignificance of Karma 'phrin las pa in the scheme of events (and his possibly lesser involvement). Yet, these incidents might have had a decisive influence on the scholar.

3.2 Names and Titles

Gene Smith has illustrated in his classical introduction to Kong sprul's work how various names (such as family, ordination, and bodhisattva names) as well as titles are common within Tibetan traditions.¹⁵⁵ And although such details are not fully available for Karma 'phrin las pa, he goes by various names and titles (that are sometimes confused in the literature), and it is vital to establish them all so that future researchers can properly identify him.

It has been a main point of the previous Chapter Two that “Karma 'phrin las pa” itself is a title provided by the Karmapa. A name by which Karma 'phrin las pa was often known is: dPal phyogs thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba'i lha, which can be translated as “Glorious God who is Completely Victorious over All Directions.” The basic word here is “god/supreme being” (Tib. *lha*, Skt. *deva*), which is rather rare in Tibetan names, although we find persons such as lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal (1437–1557) or Ngor abbot Lha mchog seng ge. A

¹⁵⁴ *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1162: *sde gzar gyi dbang gis* (for the full Tibetan text, see Chapter Five, for the translation, see Chapter Six). *rNam par thar pa ngo mtshar yid kyi shing rta* fol. 26r.4: *khams kyi rgyal khams rnams ljang dmag gi 'jig pa las skyob pa'i slad du* (see section 3.10.2, below). dPal don grub rnam rgyal, *dPal ldan zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa*, p. 114.8: *sku rab pa nang 'khrugs pa'i dbang gis*. This passage is translated below, in section 3.3.1.

¹⁵⁵ In the section “The Many Names of Kongtrül”, Gene Smith (2001, pp. 258–262) has mentioned the following name types: (1) names of childhood, (2) names of monastic ordination, (3) the bodhisattva vow name, (4) esoteric initiatory name, (5) name as treasure discoverer, (6) grammatical name, (7) incarnation name. In the case of Karma 'phrin las pa, the sources do not allow for such a detailed differentiation.

shorter form of part of the name often used in the colophons is Phyogs las rnam rgyal, while a less frequent form is Phyogs las pa.¹⁵⁶

Karma 'phrin las pa was one of those responsible for bringing “The Blue Annals” (*Deb ther sngon po*) into print, and (one of its) printing colophons adds a region along with a reverential supplement *dpal* (“radiant, glorious”) to his name: Shar Dwags po pa dPal phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i lha, which indicates that he stemmed from Dwags po, an area situated east of Lhasa.¹⁵⁷ This region is confirmed with a different spelling (*dags po 'i yul*) as the origin of his paternal lineage, which is discussed in the next section.¹⁵⁸

An additional title, Great Paṇḍita, appears in the *Dris lan* volume of Karma 'phrin las pa, beginning with the name of that same area: Dwags po Paṇ chen gsum pa, “the third Great Paṇḍit of Dwags po”. The full name of the colophon reads: “The *bahuśrota* monk, dharma teacher Karma 'phrin las pa, also known as the ‘Glorious God who is Completely Victorious over All Directions’, the third Great Paṇḍit of eastern Dwags po.”¹⁵⁹

It is likely the other Great Dwags po Paṇḍits lived roughly before the period in which Karma 'phrin las pa was active, possibly within his family. And indeed, a name of one of the maternal uncles, Don grub rgyal mtshan pa, bears the supplement “Dwags po Paṇ chen”, also described as “Shar Dwags po Paṇ di ta gnyis pa,” that is, the second Great Paṇḍit of Dwags po.¹⁶⁰ A possible and likely candidate for the first among the three Paṇḍits of Dwags po is the well-known paternal uncle of Karma 'phrin las, the Nāleṇdra abbot Dwags po bKra shis

¹⁵⁶ This appears in all spiritual biographies about Karma 'phrin las pa as well as in those of the Seventh and Eighth Karmapa. Phyogs las rnam rgyal was Karma 'phrin las pa's main name, and was perhaps an ordination or thus far unconfirmed birth-name. *Phyogs las rnam rgyal* reminds of the tantric expression, “conduct victorious in all directions” (*phyogs las rnam rgyal gyi spyod pa*). The entry “perfect conduct” (*mthar phyin pa spyod pa*) of a tantric manual lists four types: secret conduct, ascetic conduct, public conduct, and conduct victorious in all directions. The latter is a behaviour not respecting what is thought to be suitable and what is not. It consists of the four actions (*las bzhi*) which give rise to the three types of perfect victory: “All views were destroyed, therefore victorious over the view. There is neither death, nor afflicting emotions (*kleśa*), nor the aggregates, nor taking pride in one's qualities—therefore victorious over the four demons (*māras*). All paths (*yāna*) are accomplished in one (other possibility “all paths are recognised as one”), therefore victorious over the lower paths. Thus, all clinging is impeded, and he is called ‘victorious over all directions.’” (Mar pa and bKra shis dPal 'byor, *rTsa lung 'phrul 'khor*, p. 168: *lta ba thams cad zhig pas/ lta ba las rgyal/ 'chi ba dang/nyon rmongs dang/ phung po dang/ yon tan la mchog 'dzin med pas/ bdud bzhi las rgyal/ theg pa thams cad gcig tu rtogs pas theg pa dman pa las rgyal/ de ltar zhen pa thams cad bcad pa 'i phyir/ phyogs las rnam rgyal ces bya'o*). The Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionary (CAND) has: *phyogs las rnam rgyal* = *digvijaya*, making perhaps **digvijaya-cārya*? This is not confirmed in the *Kālacakra*- or *Hevajratra* though.

¹⁵⁷ 'Gos lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. II, p. 1270; (poti: vol. *ba*, fol. 13r): *rgyud dang 'bras bu theg pa mtha' dag la rigs pa dang grol bar smra ba'i spobs pa dge ba can shar dwags po pa dPal phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i zhes bya bas*. “Shar Dwags po pa dPal phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i lha, with the excellent brilliance to uphold with logic and liberation the entirety of causal and fruit vehicles (sūtra and tantra).” For the translation of this passage also refer to: Roerich (1996), p. 1090.

¹⁵⁸ *rNam par thar pa ngo mtshar yid kyi shing rta*, fol. 2v.4: *shar phyogs dags po 'i yul*.

¹⁵⁹ *Dris lan* no. 3, fol. 11v (p. 108): *mang du thos pa 'i dge slong chos smra ba karma phrin las pa ming gzhan dPal phyogs thams cad rnam par rgyal ba'i lha zhes ba shar dwags po 'i paṇ di ta gsum pas*.

¹⁶⁰ *rNam par thar pa ngo mtshar yid kyi shing rta*, fol. 5r.2: *mkhyen rab dang thugs rje mtshungs pa med pa shar dwags po paṇḍita gnyis pa mkhan chen don grub rgyal mtshan dPal bzang po*. He acted as *las kyi slob dpon* in Karma 'phrin las pa's ordination (see section 3.7.1 below).

rnam rgyal (1399–1458).¹⁶¹ A short passage about Don grub rgyal mtshan from the genealogy of his brother Zur mkhar mNyam nyid rdo rje (another famous uncle of Karma 'phrin las pa) settles the question succinctly:

It is clearly established, that the three, Kun mkhyen bKra shis rnam rgyal, this very great individual himself [Don 'grub rgyal mtshan] and Zhabs drung Karma 'phrin las pa have been given the names First, Second and Third Paṇḍi ta of Shar Dwags po respectively.¹⁶²

Since the evidence presented here stems from various sources of the 16th century from the milieu of Karma 'phrin las pa, the case is convincing.¹⁶³ We further learn about another name variation used frequently in this spiritual biography of mNyam nyid rdo rje, namely Zhabs drung Karma 'phrin las pa. A certain Dwags po Rab 'byams pa Chos rgyal bstan pa (1449–1524), Karma 'phrin las pa's contemporary and student of the Seventh Karmapa, cannot be confirmed, but is worth mentioning due to the similar name and time period.¹⁶⁴

This title of Great Paṇḍit from Dwags po seems to have become fairly established next to the bKa' brgyud pa related title Karma 'phrin las pa: later in history, the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), in his records of teaching received, uses simply “Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal (also known as Karma 'phrin las pa)” or “Dwags po Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i lha (nephew of bKra shis rnam rgyal and dGe bshes from 'Bras yul and having been appointed as Lama in gNyug la Legs bshad gling, known as Karma 'phrin las),” interestingly identifying him as dGe shes from Bras yul (where he would complete his scholastic studies).¹⁶⁵ What is more, he also considers him a Sa skya dGe bshes (who then became a bKa' brgyud pa), while the name used in all lineage prayers would contain yet another honourable title, “the omniscient” (*thams cad mkyen pa*), as in Thams cad mkhyen pa rJe btsun phrin las zhabs.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ On the three bKra shis rnam rgyal, see Jackson (2008). All three play a part in the life of Karma 'phrin las pa.

¹⁶² dPal don grub rnam rgyal, *dPal ldan zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa*, p. 88.6: *kun mkhyen bkra shis rnam rgyal/ bdag nyid chen po 'di nyid/ zhabs drung karma phrin las pa gsum po shar dwags po'i pan di ta dang po dang gnyis pa gsum pa zhes pa'i msthan gdags pa gsal por grub pa 'di lags so//*. The author of this work lived during the 16th century.

¹⁶³ According to van der Kuijp (2006, p. 23), the first Paṇḍit of Dwags po was indeed bKra shis rnam rgyal, as confirmed by the *Kun mkhyen bkra shis rnam rgyal gyi rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar gyi rgya mtsho*, a fifty-folio block print authored by Karma 'phrin las pa. As second Paṇḍit of Dwags po, van der Kuijp (*ibid.*) suggests Zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje; however, no reference is presented. Given the evidence (see previous two notes) from *rNam par thar pa ngo mtshar yid kyi shing rta* and *dPal ldan zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa*, we can identify Don grub rgyal mtshan as second Paṇḍit of Dwags po. Numerous scholars stemmed from Dwags po, which is further complicated by a note on TBRC.org, “A-kyu-ching gsan-yig suggests Karma 'phrin las pa and Dwags po Paṇ chen are two individuals.” It seems unreliable, however, as presented above. Presumably, A kyu ching referred to one of the other Dwags po Paṇ chen.

¹⁶⁴ For a note on his life *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1165; *History of the Karma bKa'-brgyud-pa Sect*, vol. I, p. 654.

¹⁶⁵ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Record of Teachings Received*, fol. 57v: *paṇ chen phyogs las rnam rgyal / (karma 'phrin las pa'ang zer)*, fol. 75v: *dwags po paṇ chen phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i lha / (paṇ chen brkis rnam pa'i sku tsa 'bras yul gyi dge bshes yin zhing gnyug la legs bshad gling gi bla mar bsgos nas karma 'phrin las su grags)*.

¹⁶⁶ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Record of Teachings Received*, fol. 277v: *rje phyogs las rnam rgyal/ (...)* *sa skya pa'i dge bshes yin kyang/ rjes su karma pa brgyud pa'i bla mar gyur cing/ gnyug la legs bshad gling gi 'chan nyan du bskos pa sogs nas karma 'phrin las zhes grags pas/ brgyud 'debs su thams cad mkhyen pa rje btsun 'phrin las zhabs zhes snang ngo*. The full passage is translated below in Chapter Four (4.1.2).