

INTRODUCTION
TO THE LIFE OF KARMA PAKSHI (1204/6-1283)

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A human life, in chronological terms, is usually measured between birth and death. For a person who makes claims, or for whom claims are made, to have had experience of particular previous lives and to expect future human existences as a specific ecclesiastic figure, the rules of time and mortality could be said to be less rigid. Such a figure was Karma Pakshi (1204/6-1283), reputed to be the emanation of a renowned meditator, Dus gsum mkhyen pa (Dusum Khyenpa, 1110-1193).¹ To investigate the evidence for the activities of Karma Pakshi in one lifetime, it is proposed in this essay to pay particular attention to the more concrete aspects of his time alive in the human physical form that commonly was associated with the name 'Karma Pakshi', before presenting, analysing and assessing the spiritual aspects of his life. In short, in current terms, first focusing on 'the real'. Naturally, the significance of Karma Pakshi's life is more important for the processes he instigated or influenced and the ideas he communicated, but in order to understand better such significance, the physical aspects of his life will first be defined. Such focusing will have a tendency to put aside, for the time being, his visionary experiences. In relation to a thaumaturge renowned for his visions, premonitions and predictions, this is a large exclusion, but it is justifiable as an attempt to delineate the structure of his life in terms of time, place, and physical event before considering the intellectual and spiritual aspects of his life.

A second self-imposed limitation on this consideration of Karma Pakshi's life is to use only accounts which deal with his whole life, rather than include the mere mentions of him that occur in broader histories. This limitation groups together, quite naturally, accounts that have been written by authors of the bKa' brgyud sect because, Tibetan historiography being the somewhat sectarian literature that it is, authors

¹ Karma Pakshi refers to himself as *dus gsum mkhyen pa'i rnam par 'phrul* ('emanation of Dus gsum mkhyen pa'), in Karma Pakshi, *The Autobiographical Writings of the Second Karma-pa Karma-pakši*, and *Spyi lan rin mo: a Defence of the Bka'-brgyud-pa Teachings Addressed to Gyag-sde Pañ-chen* (Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1978), p.11:3. Hereafter abbreviated as Rang nam or KPRN.

from other sects generally have not been interested in writing a full biography of a figurehead from a different sect.

Thirdly, a limitation of language is introduced: the accounts of Karma Pakshi being consulted here are all in Tibetan. Since 1976 several accounts of the Karmapa hierophants as a series have been published in English (and then been translated into various European languages), and thus each has included a short biographical sketch of Karma Pakshi.² I am not yet aware of any modern works originating in other European languages that are about the Karmapas' biographies. The four primary examples in English have derived their accounts from an amalgam of several of the Tibetan literary sources herein to be examined, and some of these amalgams have had added fanciful suggestions (the posited meeting of Marco Polo and Karma Pakshi, for example).³ In other words, these Western accounts are not of much use for research, although they are interesting in themselves as part of the post-1959 cultural phenomenon of general Western interest in Tibetan Buddhist figures and their histories.

Having determined the criteria for the texts to be considered, the dates of creation of the extant Tibetan text accounts of Karma Pakshi's life range from his alleged autobiographical writings to a work recently published in the early twenty-first century (see Tables A and B). Karma Pakshi's autobiographical work and the biography attributed to his immediate successor in the Karmapa lineage, Rang byung rdo rje (Rangjung Dorje, 1284-1339), are the only two stand-alone accounts of Karma Pakshi's life, while the other accounts either form a part of a sequence of Karma pas or are part of more general histories. To be more specific for these sequential histories, in chronological order of authorship, Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje (Tselpa Kunga Dorje, 1304-1364) wrote the first account of Karma Pakshi that appears in a historical work. His almost-contemporary, mKha' spyod dbang po (Khachö

Wangpo, 1350-1405), presents Karma Pakshi's life amongst a series of individual accounts, with individual title pages. Nevertheless, the biographies are part of a series, which the author refers to in a colophon as *dkar rgyud* [sic] *rin po che'i rnam par thar pa rab gsal mchog tu grub pa rgyan gyi phreng ba*.⁴ Later, gZhon nu dpal (Shönu Pel, 1392-1481), Tshe dbang rgyal (Tse Wangyal, ?1400-?1468) and dPa' bo gTsong lag 'phreng ba (Pawo Tsuglak Trengwa, 1504-1564/6) wrote more general histories on the development of Buddhist dharma in Tibet (*chos 'byung*), both of which feature a passage on Karma Pakshi's life. Later still, when perhaps the catenate presentation of lineage becomes a standard formula, Si tu Paṅ chen (Situ Panchen, 1699/1700-1774), sMan sdong mtshams pa (Mandong Tshampa, ?-1942), Rin chen dpal bzang (Rinchen Pelzang, b.1924), 'Jam dbyangs tshul khriims (Jamyang Tsultrim, b.1942) and rDzog chen dPon slob Rin po che (Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, b.1965) have serial histories of the Karmapas, in which Karma Pakshi is allocated a chapter or specific passage. It is noteworthy that Tibetan historians have not taken to writing biographies of the individual Karmapas, but instead have preferred to treat the lives of the Karmapas as part of a series.⁵ Perhaps the cohesion of a continuous lineage has been perceived by the writers to be more important than the individual achievements. Such a perception might indicate a primary concern with progress as succession rather than as individual accomplishment—the succession is the accomplishment.

To proceed with a collation of the events of Karma Pakshi's life from these sources, the events themselves can be seen in terms of stages that are familiar for most monastic life-stories: birth, education, ordination, training, career, and death.

² For five English-language accounts of the Karmapas, see Table B: Douglas and White (1976); Karma Thinley (1980); Holmes (1995); Kagyu Thubten Chöling Publications Committee (1999), Martin (2003). Richardson's 1958 article on 'The Karma pa Sect' features Karma Pakshi, but not a biography of him. Richardson asserts the article's purpose is "...to examine some incidents in the relations of its [the Karma pa sect's] principal lamas, especially the *Ḥva-nag-pa*, with Mongolia and China" (p.142). v. H.E. Richardson, "The Karma-Pa Sect. A Historical Note. Part I", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* nos.3/4 (Oct., 1958), pp.139-164 [plus 9 plates]. Part II: *JRAS* nos.1/2 (Apr., 1959), pp.1-18.

³ The myth persists: see J.C. Harris, "Bernagchen Mahakala" in *Archives of General Psychiatry* vol.66.2 (Feb., 2009), pp.122-3. More accurately, Polo is estimated to have arrived in China to meet Qubilai in 1275 or 1276, yet Karma Pakshi probably left the Mongol court in 1264.

⁴ mKha'-spyod dbang-po, "*Chos kyi rje dpal ldan karma pa chen po'i rnam par thar pa bsam yas lha'i rnga chen*", in *The Collected Writings (gsuñ 'bum) of the Second Ḥwadar Mkhā'-spyod-dbañ-po* (Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1978), vol. 2, pp.359-360. Hereafter abbreviated as *lHa'i rnga chen* or LNC. TBRC reference: W23928, vol.2. See E.G. Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts* (Boston: Wisdom, 2001), p.40, for a short discussion of the distinction between the usage of bKa' brgyud and bKar brgyud.

⁵ The Tibetan Buddhist Research Center (TBRC) has 9 examples of *rnam thar* biographies of a solo Karma pa: W30541 vol.4 (Karma pa I, pp. 158-220; Karma pa II, pp. 256-287); W26749 (Karma pa VIII); W26570 (Karma pa X); W00EGS1016795 (Karma pa X); W23998 (Karma pa X); W1CZ1886 (Karma pa X); W27835 (Karma pa XII); W27921 (=W1KG3831, Karma pa XV).

Birth and Family

Several of the accounts of Karma Pakshi's life begin with tracing his previous lives, but without giving much more than an indication of his previous names and places of birth. However, keeping to the more concrete perspective of a life lived in one body, the earliest record of Karma Pakshi's birthplace in these accounts is given in his autobiography as 'bri klung dam pa chos kyi phyug pa'i yul'.⁶ The *Deb ther dmar po rnam kyis dang po hu lan deb ther*, completed 63 years after Karma Pakshi's death, identifies the location as 'Bri chu dam pa chos phyug'.⁷ All the subsequent accounts are in approximate agreement with this, except for the *Dam pa'i chos kyi byung ba'i legs bshad lho rong chos 'byung ngam rta tshag chos 'byung zhes rtsom pa'i yul ming du chags pa'i ngo mtshar zhing dkon pa'i dpe khyad par can*, which gives 'Bri klong gi stong byi le'i tsag to'.⁸ Much later, the eighteenth-century *sGrub brgyud karma kam tshang brgyud pa rin po che'i rnam par thar pa rab 'byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba* gives firstly 'Bri klung dam pa chos kyi phyug', then a few lines later is more specific with Sa stod dkyil le tsag to, which may correspond to *lHo rong chos 'byung's* sTong byi le'i tsag to.⁹ Although the exact location of either place name is not yet precisely determined in the maps and gazetteers consulted, their locations may become evident from local knowledge. The name 'Bri chu dam pa chos phyug' indicates Karma Pakshi's birthplace is close to the 'Bri chu river, and according to the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC) Sa stod dkyil le tsag to is in the sDe dge rdzong county.¹⁰

⁶ KPRN, p.89:5.

⁷ Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje, ed. Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, *Deb ther dmar po rnam kyis dang po Hu lan deb ther* ([Beijing]: Mi rigs Dpe skrun khang, 1981), p.87. Hereafter abbreviated as *Deb ther dmar po* or DTMP.

⁸ rTa tshag Tshe dbang rgyal, *Dam pa'i chos kyi byung ba'i legs bshad lho rong chos 'byung ngam rta tshag chos 'byung zhes rtsom pa'i yul ming du chags pa'i ngo mtshar zhing dkon pa'i dpe khyad par can* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe mnying dpe skrun khang, 1994), p.235. Hereafter abbreviated as *lHo rong chos 'byung* or LRCB.

⁹ Si tu Pañ chen, "sGrub brgyud karma kam tshang brgyud pa rin po che'i rnam par thar pa rab 'byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba", in *Collected Works of the Great Ta'i Si Tu Pa Kun Mkhyen Chos kyi Byung Gnas Bstan Pa'i Nyin Byed* (Sansal, District Kangra, Himachel Pradesh: Palpung Sungrab Nyamso Khang, 1990), vol.11, pp.175-176. Hereafter abbreviated as *Zla ba chu shel* or ZBCS.

¹⁰ Sa stod dkyil le tsag to is listed as TBRC place reference G949; sDe dge rdzong as TBRC G1539. The variations in the names of the place may be due to the authors' geographical perspectives: some were writing in Central Tibet, some were writing more locally to Karma Pakshi's birthplace.

The names of Karma Pakshi's parents are also fairly consistent across the sources, although his autobiography does not mention them, or his family, at all. The earliest detail is from *Deb ther dmar po*, which gives the father's name as 'Tshur tsha rGya dbang (Tsurtsa Gyawang) and the mother's name as Seng ge Sa lang skyid nyid (Senge Salang Kyinyi).¹¹ The *lHa'i rnga chen*, written approximately forty years after the *Deb ther dmar po*, gives the names rGya dbang 'Tshur tsha sBrang thar (Gyawang Tsurtsa Drangtar) and Seng za Mang kyi (Senge Mangi), which seems a notable variation. The later writers all follow the latter rGya dbang 'Tshur tsha order of names for the father. As for the added 'sBrang thar' epithet, Si tu Pañ chen has 'sPrang thar', which may be an indicator of 'freedom from bondage', although this jars with the claimed nobility of the family (see below). Regarding the mother's name, by the time of dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba's writing (1645) she is named as Seng bza' Mang skyid (Sengza Mangi), which is how the later writers give her name (with the occasional fuller 'Seng ge').¹² As for siblings, the *lHa'i rnga chen* is the earliest account to indicate that Karma Pakshi was the youngest child, with which later writers agree.¹³ All the accounts, excepting his autobiography, state that he was named Chos 'dzin (Chödzin) as a child.

Karma Pakshi's *Rang rnam* or autobiography does not mention his family's origins in detail, merely using the description *btsad po dbu'i rigs*, thus intimating that he was of a nobility family in the dBu region.¹⁴ The *Deb ther dmar po* more generally has *btsad po'i rigs*, 'nobility family'.¹⁵ The *lHa'i rnga chen* gives *btsad po u ri rigs*, and *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* later has *btsad po u'i rigs*, so these two accounts may refer to a U place rather than dBu. Whether the names U and dBu refer to places or to family or clan names requires further research. The *Zla ba chu shel* has *btsad po dbu'i rigs*, adding the detail that the family were anciently related to a royal family disciple of Vimalamitra (*bi ma la mu tra*), Padmasambhava and Nam mkha'i snying po (Namkhai Nyingpo).¹⁶ This royal disciple, sTag Nam mkha'i lha (Tak Namkhai Lha), was the grandson of Khri Srong lde'u btsan (Trisong Detsen,

¹¹ DTMP, p.87.

¹² Gnas-nang dPa'-bo Gtsug-lag 'phreng-ba, *Chos-'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Chodhey Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1980), vol.2, p.26:6. Hereafter abbreviated as *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* or KPGT.

¹³ LNC, 12:5. *lHo rong chos 'byung* has Karma Pakshi as the youngest of three brothers (LRCB, p.235).

¹⁴ KPRN, p.89:5.

¹⁵ DTMP, p.87.

¹⁶ ZBCS, p.176:1.

eighth century CE), as he was the youngest of the three sons of Sad na mjing yon (Sena Jingyön). sTag Nam mkha'i lha developed expertise in Buddhist praxis, and it was his brother and three nephews who were 'sent' (*btang*) to the Mi sde area in Khams, yet they kept the name as *dBu*.¹⁷ *Zla ba chu shel* adds that in the fifteenth or eleventh generation thereafter the family went to Sa stod dkyil le'i tsag to, where Karma Pakshi was born. Incidentally, sMan sdong Mtshams pa (Mendong Tsampa), writing a century after *Zla ba chu shel*, stated the gap was thirteen generations—perhaps merely splitting the difference between eleven and fifteen, rather than attempting accuracy.¹⁸ It would appear that these two accounts have made estimates at the number of generations to cover the 350-400 years from sTag Nam mkha'i lha's time until Karma Pakshi's birth.

The year of Karma Pakshi's birth is not incontrovertible. The *Deb ther sngon po* links his birth date to the arrival of Kha che Paṅ chen in Tibet, a Wood Male Mouse year (1204).¹⁹ dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba takes issue with this, and gives the date as Fire Male Tiger year, 1206, specifically adding that he considers the earlier date in the *Deb ther sngon po* to be incorrect, but not giving any reason for the alternative date. It is the 1206 date that has gained general acceptance within bKa' brgyud pa accounts.²⁰ Van der Kuijp has drawn attention to an early corroboration, written in 1455, of the 1204 date that agrees with the *Deb ther sngon po* (completed 1478) in linking the date of birth to the arrival of Śākyasrībhadra (Kha che Paṅ chen) in Tibet.²¹ Unfortunately, there is no internal evidence within Karma Pakshi's autobiography that would indicate his birth date or his age at a certain date.

Education

To move on to Karma Pakshi's childhood, his autobiography simply states that he was able to read at the age of six, and by nine or ten he

was understanding Buddha's teachings after merely one reading. The subsequent accounts largely agree, in some instances raising the age range for his precocious scriptural understanding to ten or eleven. The autobiography claims that, by resting the mind naturally in its own nature, he had some facility in meditation at this young age, but the autobiography admits that he did not recognize, in Buddhist parlance, the nature of the mind, which later accounts also record. Thus it appears that Karma Pakshi at this age was able to calm the mind in meditation, yet had not achieved insight. This may have spurred him on to seek a teacher. In any event, the autobiography does not mention any reasons for his subsequent meeting with sPom brag pa (Pomdragpa, 1170-?1249), but according to the *Deb ther dmar po* Karma Pakshi was on his way to dBus, Central Tibet, when he met sPom brag pa at Sha bom en route.²² Most of the accounts do not state Karma Pakshi's age at this first meeting, but the *lHo rong chos 'byung* does give his age as sixteen and the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* has this meeting happening when the boy was eleven years old.²³ Taking into account the indefinite dates for his birth, the meeting probably happened between 1215 (calculation derived from KPGT) and 1226 (LRCB calculation).

The meeting with sPom brag pa was crucial to the genesis of the Karmapa lineage: it is a feature of the Karmapa reincarnate ecclesiastical succession tradition that after the death of one Karmapa the esoteric instructions and transmissions are passed on to the next Karmapa *in persona* by a 'lineage-holder', usually a favoured adept disciple of the previous Karmapa. Thus the lineage goes on, from Karmapa to 'regent' and on to next Karmapa child, ensuring a degree of continuity of transmission. In this case, the first instance of Karmapa transmission, the transmission line was less direct than it later became because sPom brag pa was a disciple of 'Gro mgon ras chen (1148-1218), who in turn was a disciple of Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110-1193), known as 'Karmapa' due to his founding of the Karma monastery in Khams in 1147. Thus there was a sequence of two 'regents'. Additionally, Dus gsum mkhyen pa died in 1193 and Karma Pakshi was born eleven or thirteen years later, so this period between prior death to subsequent incarnation is the longest in the 800 years of

¹⁷ ZBCS, p.176:3.

¹⁸ Karma-nges-don-bstan-rgyas, "Chos rje karma pa sku 'phreng rim byon gyi rnam thar mdor bsduḥ dpag bsam khri shing", in *The Collected Works of Sman-sdon Mtshams-pa Rin-po-che* (Bir, Himachel Pradesh: D. Tsondu Senghe, 1975-1976), vol.2, p.50:6. Hereafter abbreviated as *dPag bsam khri shing* or PSKS.

¹⁹ 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal, *The Blue Annals: completed in A.D. 1478* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1974), p.422:5. Hereafter abbreviated as DTNP.

²⁰ However, the *lHo rong chos byung* curiously gives *lcags pho rta* year, i.e. 1210 (LRCB, p.235).

²¹ L.W.J. van der Kuijp, "Barṣi and Barṣi-s in Tibetan Historical, Biographical and Lexicographical Texts", *Central Asiatic Journal* 39.2 (1995), pp.280-1.

²² Meeting place name given in Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje, " 'Gro mgon ras pa chen po'i rnam par thar pa'o", in *Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum* (Zi Ling: mTshur phu mkhan po lo yag bkra shis, 2006), vol.4 (*Nga*), p.249:6. TBRC: W30541, vol. 4.

²³ LRCB, p.235; KPGT, p.26:6.

the Karmapa lineage.²⁴ In the thirteenth century, the reincarnation series as an institutional system was not fully established, but was in the process of developing. A significant stage in this early development are the several visions sPom brag pa experienced of Dus gsum mkhyen pa and the association of these visions with Karma Pakshi. In his *Rang nam*, Karma Pakshi states that sPom brag pa remarks "*khyod las 'phro yod pa gcig e ma yin*" ("You are someone with good karmic propensity, aren't you?").²⁵ This remark may be the beginning of the association of the name Karmapa with the notion of each holder of the title being a 'man of karma', so there may be two possible sources for the title: the man from Karma or the man of karma.²⁶

After the initial meeting, sPom brag pa proceeded to instruct Karma Pakshi. The latter's autobiography states that he received tuition in particular on the poetic meditation instructions of Saraha (eighth century CE) and 'recognizing the co-nascent great seal' meditation system of Dwags po lHa rje or sGam po pa (Dwagpo Lhaje, Gampopa, 1079-1153).²⁷ Having achieved some expertise in this meditation, Karma Pakshi states that he consulted his mentor sPom brag pa, who replied that such practice was adequate for the likes of themselves, but that Karma Pakshi would need to develop skills in the *rlung sems* ('breath and mind') instructions, passed down in the bKa' brgyud tradition from at least the time of Nāropā (956-1041), in order for Karma Pakshi to train future disciples. The later accounts do not emphasise the nature of the transmission adopted by sPom brag pa, indeed it is only the nineteenth-century *dPag bsam khri shing* account that follows the autobiography in mentioning the Saraha and Dwags po lHa rje connection for this stage of transmission.²⁸

Training

All the accounts do concur on the next major stage in Karma Pakshi's life, his ordination at Ka' thog monastery, where he received the *so so thar pa* (Prātimokṣa) vows from Byams pa 'bum (Jampa Bum), sPom brag pa and sPyan nga Mang phu ba (Jang nga Mangpuwa). At ordination the young man formerly known as Chos 'dzin was given the name Chos kyi bla ma (Chökyi Lama). It is perhaps curious that Karma Pakshi continued his studies at Ka' thog, a rNying ma monastery, but the choice may have had elements of convenience and practicality because mTshur phu was in Central Tibet and the bKa' brgyud monastery (founded by Dus gsum mkhyen pa in 1189) had deteriorated—so much so that when Karma Pakshi eventually arrived at mTshur phu as a middle-aged man he spent time repairing the ruins (*zhig mdzod mdzad*).²⁹ It would appear that in the early days of lineage succession the institutional stability of mTshur phu monastery had not been strong enough to endure the absence of a charismatic leader.

After ordination, according to the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, Karma Pakshi spent time focusing on several of the esoteric practices of Nāropā, namely the heat (*gtum mo*), illusory body (*sgyu lus*) and luminosity (*'od gsal*) practices.³⁰ He seems to have pursued these practices peripatetically, the accounts variously giving his itinerary in travelling to dGun rgang chen, Ser ko go tshang can, Go tshang brag, Sil ko dgon, sPom brag, sMar khams, sPo 'Bar, Kam po gnas nang, mTsho rong, 'Char slong, rDzi mgo, Slong mdo and then sPung ri for an extended retreat. The first five places are around the sDe dge area (Kaḥ thog monastery is 50 km south-east of sDe dge). According to *dPag bsam khri shing*, Karma Pakshi spent five years at Go tshang brag, but 'five months' is given in *Zla ba chu shel*.³¹ The latter text indicates that when Mongols (*hor*) and 'infidels' (*mi log*) harmed the area, sPom brag pa and his disciple moved south to sMar khams (200 km south of sDe dge).³² The autobiography's reporting of sPom brag pa's death at sMar khams implies that Karma Pakshi was present at the death.³³ Subsequently Karma Pakshi moved on to sPo 'bar, Kam po gnas nang, mTsho rong and then eventually to sPung ri for the important meditation retreat.³⁴

²⁴ In all subsequent intervals between death of the previous Karmapa and birth of the next one, the gap has never been more than four years. See table of dates in N. Douglas and M. White, *Karmapa: the Black Hat Lama of Tibet* (London: Luzac, 1976), p.29.

²⁵ KPRN, p.89:7. With thanks to Tsering Gonkatsang for pointing out the East Tibet idiosyncracies of the phrase *e ma yin*. Later accounts have *las can* rather than *las 'phro* - v. LNC, p.13:4; DTNP, p.423:1; KPGT, p.27:2; ZBCS, p.177:1; PSKS, p.52:4.

²⁶ Further fuller discussion of the derivation of the title Karma pa will be forthcoming in my thesis on Karma Pakshi; likewise with the name Karma Pakshi.

²⁷ *bram ze chen po sa ra ha'i mdo ha'i dgongs pa dang dags po lha rje'i phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes pa ngo sprod*, KPRN, p.90. Here, 'poetic meditation instructions' refers to Karma Pakshi's use of cod-Sanskrit *mdo ha* for *do hā*.

²⁸ PSKS, p.53:4.

²⁹ KPGT, p.31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.27:3.

³¹ PSKS, p.56:6 and ZBCS, p.179:7.

³² ZBCS, p.180:2.

³³ KPRN, p.93:1-4.

³⁴ ZBCS, p.180:3.

The autobiography remarks on sPom brag pa's death make the death date Earth Bird year (*sa bya*, 1249) given in the eighteenth-century *bsTan rtsis re mig bkod pa* chronologically unfeasible.³⁵ The latter year date has also been given by several subsequent Tibetan scholars (Sum pa mKhan po (Sumpa Khenpo), Ko zhul Grags pa 'byung gnas (Koshul Dragpa Jungne) and rGyal ba Blo bzang mkhas grub (Gyalwa Lozang Khedrub), Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (Dungkar Lozang Trinle)).³⁶ If sPom brag pa died before Karma Pakshi stayed at sPungs ri, then there is, at minimum, a period of eleven years at sPungs ri and six years at mTshur phu to account for before Karma Pakshi travels to China and Mongolia in 1255, so 1249 is not possible. Perhaps an earlier *bya* year (*me bya*, 1237) is possible for sPom brag pa's death, although factoring in a year's stay at Karma dGon and an extensive tour of Central Tibet en route to mTshur phu would make the timeline tight, and 1237 was before the Mongol invasion of 1240. Epstein has suggested, in reference to the *dPag bsam khri shing* account mentioning sPom brag pa's death at around the time of the Mongol attack, that the Mongol incursion relates to Chinggis Qagan's 1227 (fire female pig year) punitive expedition against the Xi Xia kingdom.³⁷ Such an early date would mean Karma Pakshi went south when he was 23 or 21, and that sPom brag pa died at about age 57. However, this would rather elongate the period between sPom brag pa's death and Karma Pakshi's travel to Mongolia. A death date for sPom brag pa of around 1227-1230 would not contradict internal evidence of a timeline within Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje's biography of sPom brag pa, written about a century after this putative date, but unfortunately Karma pa's biography does not mention precisely a year for the death, despite stating that it

³⁵ Jam dbyangs bzhad pa rdo rje, "*bsTan rtsis re mig bkod pa*", in *Kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa rdo rje'i gsung 'bum ka pa'i dkar chag* (South India: Gedan sungrab minyam gyunphel, 1995), vol.1, p.97.

³⁶ Sum pa mKhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor, " *'Phags yul rgya nag chen po bod dang sog yul du dam pa'i chos byung dpag bsam ljon bzang*", in *Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor gyi gsung 'bum* (xylograph scan, TBRC: W29227, vol. 1), p.555; Ko zhul Grags pa 'byung gnas & rGyal ba Blo bzang mkhas grub, *Gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod* (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1992), p.1021; Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, *Mkhas dbang Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las mchog gis mdzad pa'i bod rig pa'i tshig mdzod chen mo shes bya rab gsal* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2000), p.2288.

³⁷ L. Epstein, *The Biography of the Second Rgyal-dbang Karma-pa, Karma Barsi: Translation and Annotation*. M.A. thesis. University of Washington, Seattle, 1968, p.63, n.35.

happened during the annual Vaiśākha period.³⁸ Better evidence for the date of the demise of Karma Pakshi's teacher and transmission-master has yet to be found.

After sPom brag pa's death, Karma Pakshi then settled at sPung Ri, near the sacred mountain Kha ba dkar po, and meditated there for eleven years with a focus on the rGyal ba rgya mtsho (Gyelwa Gyamtso) praxis, yet experiencing a variety of deity visions. At sPungs ri he apparently attracted 500 disciples around him, which indicates that his career as a teacher had begun to develop.

Career

In addition to attracting disciples, it seems that after his eleven-year sojourn in retreat at sPung Ri, Karma Pakshi started to take responsibility for several monasteries developed by Dus gsum mkhyen pa. Firstly, he commissioned a Thugs rje chen po (Mahākaruna) statue to be erected at Kam po gnas nang monastery (founded 1164 by Dus gsum mkhyen pa), and then he proceeded north to Karma dgon monastery (founded 1184 by Dus gsum mkhyen pa), where he stayed a year and commissioned a statue of Byams pa (Maitreya). After a vision of dPal ldan lha mo (Palden Lhamo) had exhorted him to proceed to dBus, Karma Pakshi went west to mTshur phu (developed in 1189 by Dus gsum mkhyen pa until his death there in 1193). The *IHo rong chos 'byung* claims that en route to mTshur phu, at the 'Bri khung monastery, Chos kyi bla ma was assigned the name Karma Pakshi.³⁹ The other accounts do not include this, and it does seem peculiar, as the '*pakshi*' term is considered to be a Mongolian loan-term, but also with Uyghur and Chinese connections.⁴⁰ Taking into consideration that Mongol forces had invaded Tibet in 1240, and had failed to sack 'Bri khung monastery, one doubts that the monk ordained as Chos kyi bla ma was

³⁸ Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje, "*Rin po che pong rag* (sic) *pa'i rnam par thar pa'o*", in *Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum* (Zi Ling: mTshur phu mkhan po lo yag bkra shis, 2006), vol.4 (*Nga*), p.254:5. TBRC: W30541, vol.4.

³⁹ LRCB, p.236.

⁴⁰ v. L.W.J. van der Kuijp, "Barši and Barši-s in Tibetan Historical, Biographical and Lexicographical Texts" *Central Asiatic Journal*, 39.2 (1995), p.296. Van der Kuijp shows, pp.276-7, that the term *pakshi* and its variants was in Tibetan usage before the Mongol invasion of Central Tibet in 1240, albeit sparingly. It is noteworthy that the six times that Karma Pakshi's autobiography gives his name as *pag shi* (not counting the usage in the titles of the sections) are all in passages describing events at Mōngke's court (KPRN, pp.16 (twice), 20, 102, 104 (twice)), i.e. approximately eight years later than Karma Pakshi's first visit to 'Bri khung monastery. Further discussion of the origin of the 'title' Pakshi will appear in my thesis on Karma Pakshi.

named Karma Pakshi by fellow Tibetans in an area that had recently suffered Mongolian invasion.

Proceeding to mTshur phu monastery, Karma Pakshi records briefly that he was there six years, repairing the monastery and attending to the spiritual welfare (*smin cing grol ba*) of his followers.⁴¹ His stay in the area included two tours of the Central Tibet region.⁴² The autobiography gives numerous instances of Karma Pakshi's visions while staying at mTshur phu, and also while touring the region. His own account shows little interest in the people met or details of the monastery development—it is more a listing of visionary experiences and the names of the places at which they occurred (as many as 30 visions recorded for this six-year period). His successor, Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, likewise focuses on recording the visions and where they occurred, but also adds to almost every instance a comment on the vision's symbolic significance (*brdar*). Thus, for example, a vision of Saraha is a sign of achieving *siddhi*,⁴³ of Slob dpon Pad ma (Loppön Pema, Padmasambhava), a sign of subduing illusory existence;⁴⁴ of several Buddhas, a sign of powerful activity,⁴⁵ and so on. Karmapa III's *Bla ma rin po che'i rnam par thar pa* indicates, by use of the honorific verb, that it is Karma Pakshi who himself stated (*gsungs*) these significances, but the autobiography itself does not indulge in such elucidations. Two subsequent accounts, *lHa'i rnga chen* and *Zla ba chu shel*, are the only two to repeat many of these correlations between a vision and its significance, probably indicating these two accounts' reliance on the *Bla ma rin po che'i rnam par thar pa* for the vision records. Further investigation of the visions, and their possible patterns and correlations, will be elaborated in a later study of the visions. The accounts under consideration here have amongst them more than thirty different occurrences of visions during the mTshur phu and Central Tibet episodes.

⁴¹ KPRN, p.98:5.

⁴² According to *lHa'i rnga chen* (pp.69-72) and *Zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba* (pp.193-7), Karma Pakshi travelled through the area south of Lhasa, visiting Tsa ri, gYag sde, Yar chab gtsang po, mGur mo, Bye gling, dBu ri. He returned to mTshur phu and then later went on a tour north of Lha sa, visiting sTag lung, 'Bras skud, Rag ma me shug brag, sTod lung mda'.

⁴³ LRNT, p.5b:1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.5b:3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7a:4.

Imperial Mongol Politics

The next major episode in Karma Pakshi's life was his interaction with the two grandsons of Chinggis Qan, Möngke (1207-1259) and Qubilai (1215-1296). Karma Pakshi's autobiography simply states that he was at mTshur phu when an envoy (*gser yig pa*) was sent by Qubilai Qan, requiring the lama's presence at court.⁴⁶ After initial prevarication (*'gro 'am mi 'gro the tsom za ba las*), Karma Pakshi decided to accept the invitation (with encouragement from a vision), sent the messenger back, and left for Khams and Mongolia (*hor yul*).⁴⁷ Karma Pakshi's account does not give a date for this episode.⁴⁸ The decision to go may well have been not an easy one: Karma Pakshi had travelled to avoid marauding Mongols in East Tibet, and the communal memories of the invasion of 1240 in Central Tibet should still have been fresh. In the later accounts, several have the initial meeting with Qubilai Qan taking place at Rong yul gser stod (East Tibet) in 1255. The earliest biographies give no date for this meeting, and it is not until the *lHo rong chos 'byung* that there is an indication that Karma Pakshi was touring in 1255 (*yos bu'i lo*) in Kam chu, mGa', Mi nyag, Yu gur and Hor, after his meeting with Qubilai.⁴⁹ The much later *Zla ba chu shel* makes the comment that the two men first met in 1255 when Karma Pakshi was 50 years old.⁵⁰ In some modern Tibetan references, the date given is earlier: Dung dkar Blo bzang 'Phrin las's *Lo tshigs dwangs shel me long* gives the year 1254 for the invitation, and the dates chart (*re'u mig*) in the appendix of the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* dictionary refers to Karma Pakshi going to China in 1254.⁵¹

⁴⁶ KPRN, p.98:6 - *gser yig pa btang nas gdan 'dren du byung ba'i dus su*. Repeated verbatim in LNC, p.41:5, and ZBCS, p.198:2.

⁴⁷ KPRN, pp.98:7-99:3.

⁴⁸ Subsequent events which occurred in west China after the meeting with Qubilai Qan are recorded in a different passage (KPRN, p.14:4) as taking place in the twelfth month of the Hare Year, i.e. early 1256, so his autobiography does seem to indicate the first meeting as being in 1255.

⁴⁹ LRCB, p.236.

⁵⁰ ZBCS, p.198:6. Qubilai was 40 years old in 1255.

⁵¹ Yisun Zhang, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985), p.3230. See also Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, *Mkhas dbang Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las mchog gis mdzad pa'i bod rig pa'i tshig mdzod chen mo shes bya rab gsal* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2000), p.2288. The *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* article (pp.30-31) on Karma Pakshi states that Karma Pakshi went to *sog yul* to meet Qubilai Qan (*rgyal sras hu pe li*), which seems to be inaccurate, if *sog yul* relates to the Sogdian area. The *Rang rnam* states that after receiving the invitation, Karma Pakshi went to Khams and then *hor yul* (KPRN, p.99:3). The latter geographical term, Hor, is known for being problematic, but

It would appear that this initial collaboration between the two middle-aged men, one a Tibetan visionary and one a Mongol princely warrior, had some success amongst the Mongol court.⁵² Then Karma Pakshi decided to leave. Why he made this decision is not explicitly explained. Karma Pakshi is, perhaps diplomatically, always reticent in mentioning his troubled interactions with Qubilai, contrasting significantly with his more forthcoming accounts of successful dealings with Möngke Qan. For this episode, Karma Pakshi merely mentions that he knew of omens that there would be much conflict, and that visionary experiences had indicated a previous connection with the 'northern palace' which necessitated his going north.⁵³ Later Tibetan accounts of Karma Pakshi's life do not speculate on the reasons for the move, despite the fact that his departure might be seen as considerably important for the history of relations between China and Tibet: the absence of Karma Pakshi from the Mongol court that later governed a unified China left open the opportunity for the young 'Phags pa's (Pagpa) greater influence in the Mongol court ('Phags pa was 20 years old in 1255). 'Phags pa's cooperation with the Mongol dynasty in China has been perceived as setting something of a precedent: the 'patron and priest' relationship which, although the connection was interrupted by Tibetan revolts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, has become part of the general historical narrative of Tibet's relations with China.⁵⁴

Karma Pakshi appears to use it in the general sense of 'Inner Mongolia'. In late 1253 Qubilai was in Yunnan on his first campaign proper, subduing the Ta Li (Dali) kingdom (v. M. Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan - His Life and Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp.24-25). Apparently, Qubilai returned to his appenage (*ur rdo*) in North China during the eighth moon of 1254 (v. C.Y. Liu, "The Yuan Dynasty Capital, Ta-tu: Imperial Building Program and Bureaucracy", in *T'oung Pao*, vol.78, part 4/5 (1992), p.270). Most of the Tibetan accounts have Qubilai with his army meeting Karma Pakshi at Rong yul gser stod, which Epstein (*op.cit.*, p.71, n.111), from an informant, places in an area between Litang and Tachienlu (the latter also known as Kangding or Dar rtse mdo). The whereabouts of Qubilai in 1255 needs to be determined, in order to confirm the Tibetan accounts' record of the meeting with Karma Pakshi in East Tibet in 1255.

⁵² KPRN, p.90: *rgyal 'bangs thams cad kyis bkur sti bsnyan bkur rgya chen po bgyis pa*.
⁵³ KPRN, p.99: *chags sdang 'khrug pa mang po 'byung ba'i ltas rnamshes par byung zhing sngon gyi 'brel pa'i stobs kyi byang phyogs kyi pho brang du 'gro dgos par bla ma yi dam mkha' 'gro'i bskul ma yang byung*.

⁵⁴ v. Ruegg's three works relating to *yon mchod* ('donor and spiritual officiant'), in theory and in practice: D.S. Ruegg, 'mChod yon, yon mchod and mchod gnas/yon gnas: On the historiography and semantics of a Tibetan religio-political concept', in *Tibetan History and Language: studies dedicated to Uray Géza on his seventieth birthday*, edited by E. Steinkeller (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1991), pp.441-453; D.S. Ruegg, *Ordre Spirituel et Ordre*

Karma Pakshi records that in his travel north, into the Hor region, he had had built the 'Phrul snang sprul pa'i lha khang in just 101 days.⁵⁵ In 1256 Karma Pakshi met Möngke Qan, at the latter's '*ur rdo*' (Mongolian *ordo*, 'nomad palace'), at Qara Qorum. The Mongolian history section in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* has a useful account, with year dates, which Karma Pakshi features in. Later accounts acknowledge using *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* as a source, and one suspects that it was particularly the Mongolian history section that proved useful to subsequent writers. However, the earlier *Deb ther dmar po* and *lHa'i rnga chen* also treat the episodes with Möngke in some detail. Curiously, both the *Deb ther sngon po* and the *lHo rong chos 'byung* do not spare much attention on the Mongolian episodes. Karma Pakshi himself included several passages scattered in his autobiography relating to his dealings with Möngke, in particular the royal policies he claimed to have influenced.

Firstly, Karma Pakshi claimed to have converted Möngke and much of the court to Buddhist tenets, after which the ruler seems to have gained some realization of freedom from subjectivity (*gzung 'dzin grol*).⁵⁶ The 'conversion' may have followed after a public debate or competition with rival religious figures (Nestorian Christian and Daoist).⁵⁷ The autobiography claims that subsequently Möngke instigated a programme of releasing treasury funds to be distributed amongst the subjects, honouring Buddhist morality observances, establishing a rule of no slaughter of animals for three days per month, releasing prisoners, sponsoring the building of new Buddhist structures and the repair of damaged ones.⁵⁸ The *lHa'i rnga chen* and *Zla ba chu*

Temporel dans la Pensée Bouddhique de l'Inde et du Tibet (Paris: Collège de France Publications de l'Institut de civilisation Indienne, 1995); D.S. Ruegg, 'The Preceptor-Donor (*yon mchod*) Relation in the Thirteenth Century Tibetan Society and Polity, its Inner Asian Precursors and Indian Models', in *Tibetan Studies*, edited by H. Krasser et al. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), vol. II, pp.857-872. On p.860 Ruegg states that the earliest use of *yon mchod* 'as a copulative compound designating the relation between a donor and preceptor' is in the *Deb ther dmar po*, but Karma Pakshi's autobiography uses the term in that sense four times (KPRN, pp.19, 21, 34, 107).

⁵⁵ KPRN, p.13:4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.101:7 - 102:2.

⁵⁷ Reference to debate (*rgol*) which Karma Pakshi may have participated in is in LNC, p.43:2. Indications that there was more of a competition (*rtsod pa dang nus pa 'gran pa byas pa*) are in KPGT, p.36:1 and ZBCS, p.203:4 (*rang cag stobs dang rdzu 'phrul 'gran par bya yi shog cig*). See Thiel (1962) and Kubo (1968) for discussions of the religious debates enacted for the Mongol Emperors.

⁵⁸ KPRN, pp.102:3 - 104:1.

shel quote verbatim the lengthier passage in the autobiography which gives these economic and social policies.⁵⁹ In a separate passage, the autobiography presents these policies as almost a list, which *lHa'i rnga chen* again reproduces verbatim and dPa' bo gTsong lag 'phreng ba appears to have used in his *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, either from the autobiography itself or from the *lHa'i rnga chen* copy of the passage.⁶⁰ In the *Rang nam* presentation of these social policies, and in commendation of the meditative abilities of Möngke, Karma Pakshi shows the emperor in a highly favourable light, with no intimation that this was the same man who had a degree of responsibility for the cataclysmic slaughter at Baghdad in 1258.⁶¹

Before Möngke's death in 1259, Karma Pakshi had decided to return to Tibet, with Möngke's approval. Möngke died while on campaign in China, and after a civil war between the Mongolian qans, Qubilai emerged triumphant as Qagan in 1264. As intimated above, Karma Pakshi is somewhat reticent about his dealings with Qubilai, but it appears from later accounts that Qubilai issued a death warrant against Karma Pakshi.⁶² The autobiography describes the edict as a '*ja' sa drag po* ('fierce edict').⁶³ The earliest record of the tortures Karma Pakshi suffered is in the *Deb ther dmar po*: torture by fire, water, weapons, poison and some sort of head implement with iron spikes (*mgo la lcags gzer btab*).⁶⁴ Later records have the tortures happening at two separate periods, so the first four types of torture listed above occur before Karma Pakshi, apparently inviolable, was exiled to the beach area of an ocean. Then after a summons back to court at Cang to, two years later, the head torture, with starvation, was applied. This latter torture Karma Pakshi does record, but with no comment, just adding a record of the visions he experienced at the time.⁶⁵ Notably, dPa' bo gTsong lag 'phreng ba used verbatim passages from the *Rang nam* (from the first section, *gDug pa tshar bcod*) for some of the events of

these episodes, and acknowledges the source.⁶⁶ The *lHa'i rnga chen* also quotes directly from the autobiography, but does not acknowledge the source for these passages, so perhaps dPa' bo gTsong lag 'phreng ba did have access to the *gDug pa tshar bcod* section of the *Rang nam*. Also of note is that an additional event is commented on in two modern accounts: during this period Karma Pakshi cut his distinctive beard off, in so doing making the allegorical statement that just as the beard was cut, so too would the royal lineage be cut.⁶⁷ This may come from an oral tradition—in recent years (late twentieth century, prior to the publication of these two modern works) the beard-cutting episode has been commonly recounted orally as one of the salient events of Karma Pakshi's life, but there is no indication of the story in pre-modern records.⁶⁸

More generally, the accounts are agreed that eventually reconciliation was agreed between Qubilai Qan and Karma Pakshi, but the latter declined the invitation to stay. The Tibetan accounts present Qubilai as something of a 'malevolent king',⁶⁹ whereas Möngke is seen as more the benevolent emperor.

Retirement Years

After his activity in China and Mongolia, Karma Pakshi returned to Tibet.⁷⁰ Several accounts agree, in accordance with Karma Pakshi's statement, that it took him eight years to return from the Mongol court to mTshur phu.⁷¹ However, the autobiography and accounts do not

⁵⁹ KPGT, p.41:7.

⁶⁰ Rin-chen dpal-bzang, *mTshur phu dgon gyi dkar chag kun gsal me long* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1995), pp.357-8; lDan ma 'Jam dbyangs tshul khriims, *Dpal karma pa sku phreng rim byon gyi mdzad nam* (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997), p.74.

⁶¹ v. Karma rGyal mtshan, *Kam tshang yab sras dang dpal spungs dgon pa'i lo rgyus ngo mtshar dad pa'i padma rgyas byed* ([Chengdu]: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997), p. 31, where the author remarks on the fact that this beard-cutting episode is probably an oral tradition: *lo rgyus du ma zhig ngag rgyun du gleng srol yod*.

⁶² e.g. *rgyal po gdug pa can* in KPGT, p.46:3.

⁶³ The *re'u mig* in Yisun Zhang, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985), p.3231, gives the date as 1264. Elsewhere in the Tibetan accounts here considered the year is not specified. Petech (1990, p.16) states that "Only after eight years he [Karma Pakshi] was allowed to return to Tibet." This appears to be a misreading of ZBCS 216:6 (given as source 'KARMA' in p.16, note 42), where it states that Karma Pakshi took eight years to get to mTshur phu from 'Cong to' (probably 'Cang to', ZBCS 215:1).

⁶⁴ KPRN, p.105:7.

⁵⁹ LNC, p.49:1-5; ZBCS, p.204:4-7.

⁶⁰ KPRN, pp.16:1-5; LNC, p.41:1-5; KPGT, p.35:1-3. See below in the next paragraph for an indication that dPa'-bo gTsong-lag 'phreng-ba did have access to the *Rang nam*, not just the *lHa'i nga chen*.

⁶¹ T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.83, n.12.

⁶² LNC, p.65:4.

⁶³ KPRN, p.104:4.

⁶⁴ DTMP, p.92. Further research into mediaeval Chinese and Mongolian torture techniques may prove more forthcoming, if not somewhat distasteful.

⁶⁵ KPRN, p.8:1.

specify in detail the activity undertaken on the lengthy journey, just a few episodes of healing, peace-making and Buddhist proselytizing are recounted, with the occasional vision. Perhaps much of the time on this slow progress was taken up in Karma Pakshi's ongoing interest in repairing and establishing monasteries.

On Karma Pakshi's return to mTshur phu, he became engaged in commissioning and consecrating statues. His autobiography devotes a whole section, *lHa chen po 'dzam gling rgyan bzhengs pa'i rnam thar*, on the subject of the huge statue he commissioned for the main temple at mTshur phu.⁷² The impetus to erect the statue came from a dream he had of a huge Buddha statue (10 spans high, *sku 'dom bcu yod pa*), with an echoing voice telling him that by building such a statue peace would come to the country.⁷³ This section of the autobiography goes on to give Karma Pakshi's views on consecration, extolling the importance of creating supports for worship, thereby encouraging people to turn to Buddhist ideas. Such practical applications of religious activity are a theme of his later life: constructing and repairing monasteries and stupas, erecting and consecrating statues, encouraging people to sing the *ma ni* mantras in devotion to the deity of compassion, sPyan ras gzigs (Chenrezig).⁷⁴ The *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* refers to an apparent jibe from the courtly 'Phags pa that Karma Pakshi was merely a *ma ni pa*, perhaps meaning something of a village chanter.⁷⁵ However, the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* passage goes on to present a timeline of Mongol-Tibetan relations leading up to this period and concludes that Karma Pakshi was lama to Möngke Qagan (in 1256) before 'Phags became an imperial chaplain (Qubilai was not *qagan* until 1264), finalising the argument by stating that in any case the term '*ma ni pa*' had a different connotation in the thirteenth century than at the time of writing (sixteenth century). The argument appears to indicate the author's antithetic concern with the historical perspective of Sa skya pa pre-eminence for this period.

Interaction between 'Phags pa and Karma Pakshi is not extensively recorded, which is particularly unfortunate, especially for the times when both were in China (if indeed they met in Qubilai's court). Questions remain about 'Phags pa's role when Karma Pakshi was undergoing hardships at Qubilai's orders. However, 'Phags pa later made two visits to Central Tibet.⁷⁶ The *Deb ther dmar po* states that he and Karma Pakshi met at mTshur phu, and they both sat on level seats (presumably a symbolic protocol indicating mutual respect). The latter text then has it that Karma Pakshi was complimentary to 'Phags pa in saying that when he, Karma Pakshi, was the *bla mchod* (chaplain) for Möngke Qan, he saw 'Phags pa as a bodhisattva.⁷⁷ This may indicate that they had met at Möngke's court, but not necessarily. In any case, it does hint at an eventually harmonious relationship, whatever may have happened at court more than a decade earlier.

Another encounter Karma Pakshi had in the later years of his life was important in terms of the development and continuation of the nascent Karmapa lineage. At mTshur phu he met with O rgyan Rin chen dpal (Orgyen Rinchen Pel, 1229/30-1309), to whom he entrusted the transmission to pass on to the postulated next incarnation. The nature of the transmission is not elucidated. The earlier accounts give no details of the meeting—it is not until the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* account that we learn that O rgyan Rin chen dpal's visit lasted just three days.⁷⁸ From this passage in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, it would appear that elements of the transmission consisted of instructions (*gdams ngag*), an empowerment ritual (the rGyal ba rgya mtsho deity empowerment), and the donation of a black hat, as a vestment symbol of transmission for the next Karma pa. During the rGyal ba rgya mtsho empowerment, Karma Pakshi placed a bowl of barley on O rgyan Rin chen dpal's head and stirred it three times—this seems to have been something of an esoteric 'word-less' transmission, although the author does not comment

⁷² Richardson described the statue as being 60 feet tall and made of brass, but took no photograph (H.E. Richardson, "Memories of Tshurphu", *Bulletin of Tibetology*, no.1 (1982), pp.31-34. His visits were in 1946 and 1950. The statue was destroyed in 1966 during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

⁷³ KPRN, pp.22-3.

⁷⁴ The traditional tune for the claimed Karma Pakshi style of singing of the mantra is not well-known. A current lama, Lama Norlha based in Wappinger Falls, USA, claims to know the traditional tune, and his singing of it has been recorded and the transcribed into Western musical notation by the composer Dirk de Klerk, in 2003, but not published.

⁷⁵ KPGT, p.38:2.

⁷⁶ Wylie has given the dates of the Central Tibet visits as 1265-1269, and 1276-1280 (death). v. T.V. Wylie, 'The First Mongol Conquest of Tibet Reinterpreted', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 37.1 (June 1977), pp.103-133. If Karma Pakshi had taken eight years to return to mTshur phu, then the meeting of the two men at mTshur phu must have been during 'Phags pa's second tour of Central Tibet. 'Phags pa convened a religious conference at Chu mig near Sa skya in 1277, but there is no evidence yet discovered that Karma Pakshi attended. *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (KPGT, p.53:3) has it that Karma Pakshi, aged 72, met 'Phags-pa, aged 43, in the *me glang* year (1277) at mTshur-phu. *Zla ba chu shel* (p.227:5) states they met at gNam (50 km. SW of Lhasa).

⁷⁷ DTMP, p.93: *sngar nga mong kha rgyal po'i bla mchod byas pa'i dus su / ngas khyed la byang chub sems dpa' mthong na dga' bar btags pa e ma yin zhes...*

⁷⁸ KPGT, pp.56:1-58:1.

on it. The only set of instructions explicitly mentioned in this context are those given on the 'Introduction to Three Bodies' (*sku gsum ngo sprod*).⁷⁹

Death

The demise date of Karma Pakshi is first recorded in the *Deb ther dmar po*—3rd day of the 9th month in the Sheep Year (1283-4), which the later accounts generally agree with. The signs which occurred at his death are the type of signs that might be said to be commonly associated with the death of great lamas in the Tibetan tradition: two suns appearing in the sky, a 'rain of flowers' (*me tog char 'babs*), unusual sounds, and so forth. Karma Pakshi's cremation was undertaken within ten days, at his prior request, and various relics were found thereafter in the cremation ashes: the heart, tongue and eyes of Karma Pakshi, as well as *ring bsrel*—symbolic objects with markings associated with tantric practices (rare conch shells, deity insignia, seed-syllables of deity mantra practices).

The manner of transference of consciousness from Karma Pakshi to the child who became known as his successor, Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, is best-known in the English language from Roerich's translation of the *Deb ther sngon po*.⁸⁰ Unfortunately the *Deb ther sngon po* gives no indication what the author's source for the tale is. However, the earlier work *Deb ther dmar po*, wherein the account of the transference episode is less fulsome, refers to a *Bar do'i rnam thar* text as the source of the author's information for this sequence.⁸¹ Later, the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, in a lengthy passage on the transference, refers to a *Rnam thar bar do ma*, which may be the same text.⁸² If they

⁷⁹ The nature of the *sku gsum ngo sprod* (also the *sku bzhi ngo sprod*) will be explored in further research on the philosophy and practices associated with Karma Pakshi. In the KPRN, Karma Pakshi seems to prefer to extol the virtues of his *sku bzhi ngo sprod* teaching, rather than the *sku gsum ngo sprod*, but without explication (*sku bzhi ngo sprod* references in KPRN, pp.39-40, 45, 49-54, 59, 61-63, 79, 85, 90, 95, 100, 102, 107-116, 120-121, 125-126, 131-132, 135; *sku gsum ngo sprod* does not occur in KPRN). Karma Pakshi's sixteenth-century successor, Karma pa VIII, Mi-bskyod rdo-rje (1507-1554), wrote a four-volume work based on Karma Pakshi's *sku gsum ngo sprod* doctrine, which has yet to be studied (Mi-bskyod rdo-rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod kyi rnam par bshad pa mdo rgyud bstan pa mtha' dag gi e wam phyag rgya* (Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1978), see TBRC reference W23660).

⁸⁰ G.N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals* (Delhi; Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), pp.487-8.

⁸¹ DTMP, p.96:8. The near-contemporary *lHa'i nga chen* also refers to the *Bar do'i rnam thar* in the same context, but does not give the tale of transference in any detail (LNC, p.128:6).

⁸² KPGT, pp.918, 923, 925.

are indeed the one text, then to date the text has not been identified, but must have been written post-1283 (Karma Pakshi's death) and pre-1363 (completion of *Deb ther dmar po*), which might suggest it was part of Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje's *gsung 'bum*.⁸³ Yet *Deb ther dmar po* and *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* both mention a *bar do* work in connection with questions put by a mKhan po gSer khang (Khenpo Serkhang), who may have written the answers in the form of the *Bar do'i rnam thar*. Alas, information on mKhan po gSer khang is also elusive, and no record of him has been found, although he might be identified with the mKhan chen gSer khang.⁸⁴ Certainly his period of operation is feasible, but positive identification of the *Bar do'i rnam thar* and its author is not yet possible.

Every human's life-span ends with death. The claims made on Karma Pakshi's behalf—that he was a re-birth of a particular saint (Dus gsum mkhyen pa) and after death was reincarnated as a specific child—are not so unusual in themselves, in a Buddhist context. It is the combination of such claims with the institutional position of ecclesiastical head of several monasteries and the subsequent succession through specifically identified re-incarnations that was a new development, peculiar to Tibetan religious culture. In this regard, Karma Pakshi's meeting with and recognition by sPom brag pa was vital to the formation and continuation of the Karmapa lineage, as was likewise the transmission to O rgyan pa (Orgyenpa) and then Rang byung rdo rje. But in a wider context, the real revolution was in the transferral of property rights from one incarnation to the next, as occurred when Karma Pakshi took over Karma dGon, Kam po gnas nang, and mTshur phu. The grip of familial succession was loosened, if not broken. After Karma Pakshi, the idea and practice of ecclesiastical succession through claimed reincarnation spread widely in Central Asia.

⁸³ The 2006 edition of Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje's *gsung 'bum* lists in volume 1 (*Ka*), pp.39-43, works that the editors allege were written by Rang byung rdo rje but they did not find them to publish in the collection. At p.42:5 is listed a work titled *Bar do'i rnam thar pa bstan pa*, which may be a likely candidate for this elusive work. v. Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje, *Gsung 'bum* (Zi Ling: mTshur phu mkhan po lo yag bkra shis, 2006), or TBRC: W30541, volume *Ka*, section *Karma pa rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum dkar chag*.

⁸⁴ v. P.K. Sørensen & G. Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), p.105, n.131. Sørensen suggests that Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1223-1292), also known as gSer khang steng pa, may be identified with mKhan chen gSer khang. Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (TBRC: P1506) was the 8th holder of the abbatial throne of Tshal Gung-thang.

To a degree, the above account of Karma Pakshi's life begins a process of determining his life story, or at least the more concrete aspects of his life. Further research into the issues of people, time and place ('who?', 'when?' and 'where?') is required to make more sure our knowledge of an enigmatic and iconic figure. Then any attempt to address the questions of the 'what?' and 'why?' of the beginnings of the institutionalized reincarnation tradition might be more adequately answered. Karma Pakshi's influence on the consequent cultural history of the Central Asian region was crucial—in that his activity and claims helped form the eventual ecclesiastical succession system—so his intellectual and spiritual life should also be further researched, largely through his writings.

Tibetan language

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TABLE A: Pre-modern accounts of the life of Karma Pakshi

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Author	Karma Pakshi	Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje	Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje	mKha' spyod dbang po	Tshe dbang rgyal	gZhon nu Dpal	dPa' bo Gtsug lag 'phreng ba	Si tu Pan chen	sMan sdong mTshams pa
Author birth	1204/06	1284	1304	1350	?1400	1392	1504	1699	--
Author death	1283	1339	1364	1405	c.1468	1481	1564/6	1774	--
Era	13 C	14 C	14 C	14 C	15 C	15 C	16 C	18 C	19 C
Title	<i>Grub chen karma pakshi'i rnam thar</i>	<i>Bla na rin po che'i rnam thar pa'o / karma pa'i rnam thar</i>	<i>Hu lan Deb ther dmar po</i>	<i>Chos kyi rje dpal ldan karma pa chen po'i rnam par thar pa bsam yas lha'i rnga chen</i>	<i>lHo rong chos 'hyung Deb ther sngon po</i>		<i>Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston</i>	<i>sGrub brgyud karma kam tshang brgyud pa rin po che'i rnam par thar pa rab 'byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba</i>	<i>Chos rje karma pa sku 'phreng rim byon gyi rnam thar mdo' bsodus dpag bsam khri shing</i>
Title shortform	<i>Rang rnam thar</i>	<i>Bla na rin po che'i rnam thar pa</i>	<i>Hu lan deb ther dmar po</i>	<i>bSam yas lha'i rnga chen</i>	<i>lHo rong chos 'hyung Deb ther sngon po</i>		<i>mKhas pa'i dga' ston</i>	<i>Zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba</i>	<i>dPag bsam khri shing</i>
Title Acronym	KPRN	LRNT	DTMP	LNC	LRCB	BA	KPGT	ZBCS	PSKS
Title date	? (pre-1283)	? (pre-1339)	1363	? (pre-1405)	1446-1451	1478	1545	1775	1891
Yrs since KP death	—	ca.50	80	ca.120	165	215	262	492	608
TBRC ref	W27319	W30541	--	W23928	W27302 (W2CZ7697)	W7494	W28792	W26630 (W23435)	W30161
Publisher	Gonpo Tseten	mTshur phu mkhan po la yag bkra shis	Mi rigs dpe skrun khang	Gonpo Tseten	Bod ljongs bod yig dpe mying dpe skrun khang	International Academy of Indian Culture	Delhi Karmapae chodey gyalwae sungrab partun khang	Palpung sungrab nyamso khang Sansal, dist. Kangra,	Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre
Publ. place	Gangtok	Zi ling	Pe cin	Gangtok	Lha sa	New Delhi	Delhi	H.P.	New Thobgyal, H.P.
Publ. date	1978	2006	1981	1978	1994	1974	1980	1990	1973
Biography location pp.1-135		Vol.4 pp.256-287	pp.87-94	vol.2 pp.2-87	pp.235-238	pp.422-424	pp.24-59	vol.11 pp.169-256	vol. 2 pp.50-108
Length in pages	135	31	7	85	3	2	35	87	58

TABLE B: Modern accounts of the life of Karma Pakshi

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Author	N. Douglas (& M.White)	Karma Thinley, (ed. D. Stott)	Karma Blo gros chos dpal bzang po	Don rdor & bsTan 'dzin chos grags	Rin chen dpal bzang	K. Holmes	'Jam dbyangs (tshul khrims	Kagyu Thubten Chöling Publications Committee	Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche (ed. M.Martin)
Author birth	1944	1931	1933	?	1924	1948	1942	---	1965
Author death	---	---	---	---	(extant?)	---	---	---	---
Era	20C	20C	20C	20C	20C	20C	20C	20C	20C
Title	<i>Karmapa: the Black Hat Lama of Tibet</i>	<i>The History of the Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet</i>	<i>Khams gsum chas kyi rgyal po dpal rgyal dbang Karma pa sku phreng rim byon gyi mdzad rnam u dum ba ra'i chen po</i>	<i>Gangs ljongs lo rgyus thog gi grags can mi sna</i>	<i>mTshur phu dgon gyi dkar chag kun gsal me long</i>	<i>Karmapa</i>	<i>dPal karma pa sku phreng rim byon gyi mdzad rnam</i>	<i>Karmapa: The Sacred Prophecy</i>	<i>'Brief Histories of the Sixteen Karmapas', in M.Martin, Music in the Sky</i>
Title shortform	---	---	<i>U dum ba ra'i chen po</i>	<i>Gangs ljongs lo rgyus</i>	<i>Kun gsal me long</i>	---	<i>Karma pa sku phreng</i>	---	<i>Brief Histories</i>
Title Acronym	KBH	HSK	UDBR	GJLG	KGML	KIHK	KKT	KSP	BHSK
Title date	1976	1980	1986	1993	1995	1995	1997	1999	2003
Yrs since KP death	693	697	703	710	712	712	714	716	720
TBRC ref	---	---	---	W19803	W20850	---	W18133	---	---
Publisher	Luzac	Prajña Press	---	Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang	Mi rigs dpe skrun khang	Altea Publishing	Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang	Kagyu Thubten Chöling	Snow Lion
Publ. place	London	Boulder, CO	---	Lha sa	Pe cin	Forres, UK	Lan kru'u	Wappinger Falls, NY	Ithaca, NY
Publ. date	1976	1980	1986	1995	1995	1995	1997	1999	2003
Biography location pp.41-46		pp.47-52	pp.12-15	pp.299-301	pp.347-365	pp.114-115	pp.66-80	p.17	pp.278-279
Length in pages	5	5	3	3	18	2	14	1	2