CHAPTER 17

# Among Teachers and Monastic Enclaves: An Inquiry into the Religious Learning of Medieval Tibet

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Dedicated to my late supervisor Helmut Krasser (†), who was a fearless learner and gracious teacher.[1]

## Introduction

This chapter, as part of the section featuring "Spiritual Communities" in the various geographical contexts that are part of the VISCOM project, will explore the training of Tibetan Buddhist monastics and how it was represented in medieval sources of the time. Taking as the basis for textual investigation the biography or *namthar* (*rnam thar*) of a renowned 15th-century Tibetan tantric master together with his own "learning account", known in Tibetan as *senyig* (*gsan yig*), I will offer some observations on practices as well as ideas of religious "learning" in late medieval Tibet.

To begin, some general remarks will be made about procedures for deriving empirical data on the training of the Buddhist professionals who shaped the dense monastic landscape that evolved on the Tibetan plateau together with the Later Diffusion of Buddhism (*bstan pa phyi dar*) in the 11th century. I will then explain the study's methodology in view of the main focus of this VISCOM working group, "Enclaves of Learning". This will be followed by a few observations about the subject matter, with an examination of how, in the texts under consideration, the protagonist's course of learning is depicted and contextualized. Finally, a synopsis will be provided of the religious training of

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Gongkar Dorjedenpa Kunga Namgyal (Gong dkar rdo rje gdan pa Kun dga' rnam rgyal; 1432–1496), a territorial ruler in Central Tibet/Ütsang (dBus gtsang) who started his spiritual career as a lay practitioner and later founded his own monastic seat, which became known as Gongkar Dorjeden (Gong dkar rdo rje gdan) or Gongkar Choede (Gong dkar chos sde; "the religious enclave of Gong dkar"). To facilitate the study's broader accessibility, the concluding section provides a general overview of the various areas of the master's learning.

## Enclaves of Learning

As was discovered in the preliminary discussions of the VISCOM working group,[2] despite the geographic distance between the religious enclaves in Arabia, Central Asia and Western Europe under examination, not to mention their distinctive belief systems, a common field of engagement in these enclaves was in particular activities connected to learning. The concept of spiritual communities, or more specifically their "Enclaves of Learning", was thus adopted as the overall designation of our working group and in the end, "learning" became the focus of this chapter. Even with the obvious differences in the orientation or function of religious education, the knowledge and outstanding expertise of such communities were kept alive and passed on through practices of learning (and instruction). Seen functionally and from a wider historical perspective, the engagement with specific forms of learning—whether collective or individual, with or without guidance, or in formal or informal settings—is directly linked to what is often referred to as the preservation and organization of knowledge. The educational practices supported by sophisticated systems of learning (and instruction) can be seen as crucial components for the integrity and survival of intellectual traditions, including those of the religious communities under examination here.

With regard to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, which extends far beyond the political boundaries of today's PR China, ethnographic fieldwork can verify a continuity in monastic customs and educational methods, in many cases

2 The group of investigators consisted of four principal researchers (doctoral and postdoctoral) belonging to one of the different project sections within the overall project. This small group started meeting from the beginning of the VISCOM project in 2011 and worked together for almost the entire first phase of the project. Tangible results of our regular meetings are well reflected in this section of the volume.

continuing to the present day.[3] Nonetheless, if monastic institutions in the Tibetan Highlands are described here as "enclaves of learning", it must be stressed that Tibetans themselves refer to their monasteries with expressions which allude to functions and activities that are different from what is typically understood as learning.[4] In our comparative approach, which stresses the exceptional role these religious communities play, particularly in terms of erudition and the promotion of text-based knowledge, it should be recognized that Buddhist monasteries in the Tibetan cultural sphere—generally referred to as *gompa* (*dgon pa*) by Tibetan speakers—have a strong ritualistic and practice oriented dimension that is largely unrelated, or even opposed, to intellectual or scholastic learning and the propagation of knowledge as such.[5] Further, learning, in its broader terminological sense, has specific implications in each of the disciplines represented within VISCOM, and still more with regard to the

3 This is the case for monastic institutions outside modern Tibet in the southern ranges of the Himalaya in northern India, Nepal and Bhutan. Despite the complete break in monastic traditions as a consequence of the political transformation in the 1950s, several of the erstwhile larger monasteries in Tibet managed to revive basic parts of their practices (as prior to the Chinese occupation) in the second half of the 20th century. See Maher, "Tibetan Monastics and Social Justice" on the revival of monasticism under Chinese governance (272–74) and in the Tibetan Diaspora (274–76). On the re-establishment and continuity of the Tibetan monastic tradition in institutions in the Diaspora, see Strøm, "Between Tibet and the West"; Gyatso, "Of Monks and Monasteries". With regard to Gongkar Choede, I have begun to investigate the continuity of monastic practices in relation to the written corpus of the tradition. This started with a first survey of the existing ritual cycle and an attempt to trace back its activities to the underlying, but often missing source texts.

4 "Enclaves of Learning" was developed as a loose research framework to meet the particular terminological and cross-disciplinary challenges of comparative work in one of VISCOM's transversal working groups, leaving aside wider claims of classifying Tibetan monasteries as enclosed types of community exclusively dedicated to learning. Common designations for Tibetan monastic institutions in classical and modern parlance are *gompa* (*dgon pa*; Skt. *araṇya*; "remote place"), *drasa* (*grwa sa*; "monk's locality/residence"), *choede* (*chos sde*; "religious enclave/unit/entity"), *choedra* (*chos grwa*; "religious faculty/school") or *densa* (*gdan sa*; "seat [of successive teachers]").

5 On Tibetan Buddhist monasteries as ritual communities drawing on a range of ritualistic activities and performative services, cf. for instance Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 44–47, 49; Samuel, "Religion in Tibetan Society—A New Approach", 58–59. Generally speaking, Tibetan monastic institutions maintain close ties to the local laity in terms of pastoral care and spiritual services (e.g. Miller, "Educational Practices of Tibetan Lama Training", 205–08), functions that in the Christian/European medieval world were also performed by local priests and the parish churches.

diverse cultural settings in which the institutions being comparatively analysed operate. It thus seems necessary, before embarking on a textual-historical investigation, to clarify how learning is understood.

But before examining the implications and conceptual scope of learning as applied to this chapter, some considerations will be made regarding how this study was undertaken, including its empirical and methodical framework, with the nature and availability of textual evidence being briefly introduced, as well as the current state of research in the field. This helps define the scope and validity of this specialized study for its use in further comparative undertakings.

As mentioned above, the common point of departure and basis for analysis of the VISCOM working group has been the idea of spiritual communities as localized enclaves. While separated spatially from their social environment, these enclaves belong to distinct regional and socio-cultural settings with which they interact through mutual support. For methodological reasons the present study deviates slightly from this departure point, presenting an examination from the micro-historical perspective of an individual learner, rather than from the level of community and its *habitat* at large.

## The Spiritual Community (*dge 'dun*)

Within the VISCOM project, a recurring challenge in investigating the social groups, communities and networks in question has been the distinction between their "idealized" and "historically manifested" natures. Indeed, when doctrinal discourses address the community of Buddhists, Indian and Tibetan exegetes are clearly aware of this divergence in how spiritual community can be understood. Generally speaking, canonical texts and their later commentators in Tibet refer to the Buddhist community, those who follow and employ the Buddha's teachings, with the Tibetan term *gendün* (*dge 'dun*; "aspirant/s to virtue"), based on the Sanskrit *saṃgha* (*inter alia*, "assemblage"). At the idealized level, *gendün* refers to liberated individuals who have gained the spiritual rank of a "noble being" (*'phags pa*; Skt. *ārya*) through their realization of the religious truth formulated in the Buddha's first public sermon on the Four Noble Truths. This rather abstract collective of spiritually mature beings who have attained the Path of Seeing and embody the Buddhist teachings is revered as the "ultimate community" (*don dam gyi dge 'dun*) or the "assembly of Noble Ones" (*'phags pa'i dge 'dun*; Skt. *āryasaṃgha*). They form the ideal spiritual community, worshipped (and imagined) by Buddhist believers as one of the Three Jewels (*dkon mchog gsum*; Skt. *triratna; ratnatraya*) in which they take

refuge (*skyabs 'gro*; Skt. *śaraṇa*) to escape this unsatisfactory world. In a conventional sense, however, *gendün* is a designation for the Buddhist order and celibate communities in general. Here *gendün* refers to the "conventional community" (*kun rdzob kyi dge 'dun*), which is comprised of monks, nuns and novices who have taken monastic vows, as well as the Buddhist laity in a wider sense.[6] This basic distinction in understanding community has been adopted in the religio-historical literature of Tibet. The texts serving as the basis of this study address "the spiritual community of the Buddhists" in both of these dimensions: in its ideal, perfected stage as the symbolic community in which to take refuge (i.e. *dge 'dun dkon mchog*; Skt. *saṃgharatna*), and in its conventional (historically traceable) manifestation as concrete communities of monastic orders (i.e. *dge 'dun gyi sde*). Here, however, the spiritual community will be primarily examined based on the latter definition.

### The Monastic Community/Assembly (*dge 'dun gyi sde, dge 'dun gyi tshogs pa*)

The organization of larger and more prominent monastic institutions in traditional, pre-occupied Tibet (up to the 1950s) is known to have been based on different levels of interaction and coexistence.[7] Only to a certain extent did

6 On the two-fold distinction of the spiritual community (*saṃgha*) in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, cf. for instance Apple, *Stairway to Nirvāṇa*, 2ff., 62–63; Sopa, *Lectures on Tibetan Religious Culture*, 63. Moreover, the tradition has various typological lists for classifying the "ultimate community" of spiritually accomplished beings into "Eight Noble Beings" (*phags pa'i gang zag brgyad*; Skt. *aṣṭāryapudgala*), "Twenty *Saṃgha*s" (*dge 'dun nyi shu*; Skt. *viṃśatiprabhedasaṃgha*), the "*Saṃgha* of the Lesser and Greater Vehicle" (*theg dman nyan rang gi dge 'dun*, *theg chen byang chub sems dpa'i dge 'dun*) and the "Common and Extraordinary *Saṃgha*s" (*thun mong gi dge 'dun*, *thun min gyi dge 'dun*); see *inter alia* Apple, *Stairway to Nirvāṇa*, 93–98; Ngag dbang dpal bzang, *rDzogs pa chen po*, 154–55. On the soteriological function attributed to the Buddhist community of spiritual followers, figuratively compared with the supportive role of a caring nurse (*nad g.yog*), cf. Vasubhandu's *Treasury of Abhidharma Autocommentary* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, 75b); Sopa, *Lectures on Tibetan Religious Culture*, 63.

7 As, for instance, noticed in the studies by Goldstein, "Tibetan Buddhism and Mass Monasticism", 8–11; Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 49–53; Gyatso, "Of Monks and Monasteries", 218–19, 230–31. See particularly Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism*, Chapter 2 (30–31, 63, 39, 49, 51). Organization into separate monastic fractions may have been less a case of smaller, locally based ritual institutions whose past is rarely documented in written histories but can be reconstructed from ethnography and oral history; see for example Goldstein et al., "Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism", 23–26 on the religious programme at a small monastery belonging to the Kagyu (bka' brgyud) branch.

their residents receive similar training in ritual and scripture. Their members also did not follow the same obligations and disciplinary rules *per se*, nor did they share a common schedule or enjoy equal status and living conditions. It can be assumed that in the medieval period not all monks affiliated with a particular monastic enclave went through the same educational programme. Depending on the number of residents and the range of activities, at larger Tibetan monasteries it appears to have been the custom for members to have been organized in smaller units based on what they did, their position and their place of residence in the monastic compound. Depending on the type and size of the *gompa*, as well as a particular candidate's social background and personal aspirations, possible activities would have included (1) scriptural and ritualistic training, (2) ritual performance, spiritual assistance and service, (3) administration, labour and crafts, and (4) secluded practice/personal retreat.[8] Within this given set of possibilities, monastics pursued joint activities in smaller, interconnected groups, both inside and outside enclave compounds. Moreover, late medieval sources tell us that monks from densely populated institutions were affiliated to sub-monastic units—"monastic faculties/colleges" (*grwa tshang*) or "lama palaces" (*bla brang*)—through which these large religious enclaves were administered, sometimes providing homes for up to a thousand monks or more.[9] Based on their regional origins, monks were further

8 This very simplified scheme of the various activities pursued at Tibetan monasteries deserves further investigation. M. Miller gives an overview of the various career opportunities for monastics in traditional Tibet; see "Educational Practices of Tibetan Lama Training", 212–17. Other authors have proposed distinguishing between different types of monks with their respective fields of activity and functions for the community; see Goldstein, "Tibetan Buddhism and Mass Monasticism", 10; Gyatso, "Of Monks and Monasteries", 218–19, 227–29; Ekvall, "Three Categories of Inmates". The Tibetan tradition also allowed for a dynamic tradition of non-ordained ritual specialists and tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*), who were only marginal to the institutionalized forms of religious practice at monasteries.

9 The divisions of Gongkar Dorjeden monastery, for example, are visually depicted on a wall on the second floor of the main temple; see cover illustration of this volume. The small mural panel dating to the 1940s shows the monastic complex with all four colleges (*grwa tshang*) and the surrounding monk's residences (*grwa shag*). The large monastic colleges of the three great Gelugpa (dGe lugs pa) universities near Lhasa have been described as self-supporting and separate monastic entities that enjoyed religious, administrative and disciplinary autonomy from their parent institutions; see Goldstein, "Tibetan Buddhism and Mass Monasticism", 9; Onoda, *Monastic Debate in Tibet*, 26; Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 49–50. The organizational structures of monasteries adhering to other sects have had less attention in academic research; with regard to the Sakyapa (Sa skya pa), see especially Cassinelli et al., *A Tibetan Principality*, in particular 289–319, 355–57, 367–71, 397–400. On the size of monastic communities in the medieval period, see n. 15.

assigned to sections (*khams tshan*) and/or residential or housing units ([*grwa*] *shag*; *shag tshang*; hon. *gzims shag*) within the cloister complexes. Before the Chinese occupation it is known that newly admitted members of Tibet's big monasteries underwent similar elementary training in basic prayer and ritual, although student monks (often entering monasteries at a very young age) were not taught collectively, but in individual groups or under personal tutorship within the residential quarters.[10] Other than the major periodic monastic gatherings that required the participation of the "assembly [of the community]" (*tshogs*),[11] interaction seems to have been less customary between the members of the different community fractions. It can be assumed that affiliation and group cohesion between the inhabitants of Tibetan monasteries tended to develop around joint practices, from regular encounters in occupational groups on one hand, to adherence to the larger monastic subdivisions and regionally based housing units on the other.[12]

10 Initial training entails the memorization (*blo la 'dzin/zin*; hon. *thugs la 'dzin/zin*) of the monastic liturgy in order to guarantee the participation of its members in the regular chanting and collective prayer. Liturgical texts are gathered and compiled in a separate literary genre known as "[manuals for] religious engagement" (*chos spyod*). The memorization of main prayers and the key ritual texts is at the core of monastic practice and is often a requirement for taking up further studies; see Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 44, 89–90; Dodin, "Negi Lama Tenzin Gyaltsen", 95 n. 11; Sopa, *Lectures on Tibetan Religious Culture*, 4, 14. According to Goldstein, young boys were generally recruited between six and twelve years of age; see "Tibetan Buddhism and Mass Monasticism", 4. See also Cassinelli et al., *A Tibetan Principality*, 297 n. 10. On the role of personal tutors for a child's initial education, see Goldstein, "Tibetan Buddhism and Mass Monasticism", 4ff.; Goldstein et al., "Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism", 20; Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 55–9; Miller, "Educational Practices of Tibetan Lama Training", 246–48.

11 On the function of the assembly hall (*'du khang*; *tshogs khang*) in the monastic community, see Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 44–45. Periodical activities and events of a monastery are laid down in the religious programmes of the various traditions. These include regular rituals and celebrations of common Buddhist festivities, as well as those exclusive to the tradition such as "commemorative offerings [and prayer]" (*dus mchod*) for deceased masters or intensive cycles of tantric deity practice (*sgrub mchod*). A condensed practice agenda (*nyams len gyi rim pa*) of Gongkar Choede monastery in its early period is found in *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 148–49. See also Gedun Rabsal, *Gong dkar chos sde dgon pa'i lo rgyus*, fols. 11a-18b, and a recently discovered manuscript by a disciple of Lu phu ba 'Jam dbyangs nam mkha' rgyal mtshan entitled *rDo rje gdan gyi sgrub mchod dus bzhi'i dkyil 'khor dang phyag len mdzad pa po kha gsal dang bcas pa* (4 ff.), which treats the monastery's annual practices in reference to the respective text tradition.

12 Elijah Ary similarly points to the bonding aspect of group performances within larger monastic bodies. In his recently published inquiry on the early biographical tradition of the Gelugpa, he connects these joint activities with a common group ideology that is

## Textual Evidence and the Current State of Research

The different layers of community organization in the larger monasteries that existed on the Tibetan plateau up to the first half of the 20th century can already be traced in the religio-historical writing of the medieval period. Such narratives primarily describe individual divisions and groups at monasteries (persons who perform collective rituals, engage in joint studies, or are from the same native region, etc.), not the community at large.[13] This is because Tibet's historical literature is heavily constructed around the celebrated lives of religious masters and *lama*s (*bla ma*; Skt. *guru*), rather than around the communities with whom they interact. Accordingly, most historical sources describe monastic sites and their communities in terms of a particular master's spiritual career: as one of the places where he was trained or where he instructed others, where he visited on pilgrimages or for worship, or as his residential/abbatial seat (*gdan sa*). For the modern historian, the monastic community as such often remains an abstract entity, although its subgroups and adherents do appear marginally in these narratives of prominent masters and their teaching lineages. This textual evidence thus makes a socio-historical analysis at the

explained as deriving from a shared textual basis, in this case monastic textbooks (*yig cha*); see Ary, *Authorized Lives*, 8–9, 82ff.

Although these organizational structures seem to be less binding in the re-established exile institutions in Nepal and India, the contemporary tradition has preserved a strong notion of regional identity among monastics from the same native region (*pha yul gcig pa*). Gyatso ascribes an integrating function to this regional sense of belonging and argues that common pursuits can transcend these regional differences, while other aspects in the monastic life depend upon them especially; see "Of Monks and Monasteries", 231–32. It is difficult to say what role kinship plays in this context; ibid., 231. As for Drepung monastery ('Bras spungs), Goldstein does not notice any kinship ideology; see "Tibetan Buddhism and Mass Monasticism", 9. On the role of daily routine and shared practices (of liturgy, discipline, text production) in Christian late medieval monasticism as inspired by the ideal of *vita communis*, see Lutter, this volume.

13 The overall monastic community (*dge 'dun* [*gyi*] *sde*/*tshogs*) of Gongkar Dorjeden, for instance, is explicitly mentioned two times in its founder's hagiography; see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 148, 162. Note that permanent residence is not a requirement for monastic membership and that the community of a Tibetan monastery also includes individuals who reside temporarily outside the parent monastery (*ma dgon*) at affiliated monastic branches (*dgon lag*) or larger institutions specializing in higher training. See also Miller, "Educational Practices of Tibetan Lama Training", 227–28; Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 47; Goldstein et al., "Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism", 17–18; Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism*, 39. On Gongkar Choede's different branch institutions, see Jackson, "Branch Monasteries of Gongkar Dorjeden".

larger level of community difficult, either with regard to the contents of learning or other aspects of monastic life.[14]

Generally speaking, the source material available for investigating monastic learning in medieval Tibet is inadequate for a comprehensive study of all the monks or nuns affiliated with a single institution. Due to the general lack of evidence about residents in monasteries during Tibet's hegemonial period (11th-17th cent.), it is even difficult to estimate the size of such communities.[15] In the case of most institutions, charters and administrative documents that might yield information about monastic populations, community organization, organizational units and members' interaction and exchange with the surrounding laity have largely been lost or been made unavailable by the Chinese authorities. Moreover, the religious literature that is extant and available rarely touches on monastic routines or the practical implementation of spiritual training.[16] Data on monastic education has still not been assessed systematically, other than for the pre-modern period (early 17th to mid-20th cent.) and for the better-researched monastic universities of the Gelugpa tradition.[17]

14 E. Hovden, in his chapter on community welfare in medieval Yemen, distinguishes different layers of community in his genealogical sources. With regard to their visions—often only implicitly articulated in the texts at our disposal—Hovden proposes distinguishing four intersecting levels of community according to the extent of their conceptual and practical nature. C. Lutter, on the other hand, by taking into account a wide range of monastic sources, attempts to track religious communities and their specific profiles in relation to key texts of medieval monasticism.

15 As also noticed by Dreyfus; see *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 347 n. 44. The first systematic survey of Tibet's monastic population (within the three traditional provinces and from the perspective of the Gelugpa tradition) was put together by the regent of the Fifth Dalai around the turn of the 17th century. On the basis of his popular history of the Gelugpa order (i.e. *dGa' ldan chos 'byung baiḍūrya ser po*), Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (1927–1997) calculated the total population and number of the Gelugpa affiliated monasteries; see *Bod kyi chos srid zung 'brel*, 105–06. For earlier periods, we have to rely on the sparse numerical information that is provided in the religious histories and biographical accounts of Tibetan masters.

16 In contrast to the vast doctrinal and ritualistic literature that was earlier found at monasteries, historical accounts and descriptions of practical routines were far fewer and not part of the curriculum. History (*lo rgyus*) as a subject was in some cases even considered harmful to the monk's attitude toward learning; Miller, "Educational Practices of Tibetan Lama Training", 230 n. 3.

17 M. Miller's pioneering contribution on "lama training" deserves particular attention in this regard. She provides a systematic overall picture of monastic education for the premodern period on the basis of ethnographic fieldwork and extensive analysis of the available reports by travellers to Tibet before 1950. The (primarily scholastic) educational

Particularly when it comes to smaller, locally based monasteries and those following less prominent teaching lineages of Tibetan Buddhism,[18] the limited available material reveals little about their members' ritual training, monastic obligations, or scholastic programmes. A great deal of research remains to be done on Tibet's medieval monastic traditions before the establishment of the Ganden Potrang (dGa' ldan pho brang) administration/Dalai Lama state in 1642.[19] This includes research on Tibet's first monastery, Samye (bSam yas), founded with the advent of Buddhism in Tibet in the 8th century, as well as on the seminary of Sangphu (gSang phu), which gained exceptional fame as a trans-regional "enclave of learning" that shaped the scholastic tradition on the

training of the Gelugpa sect in modern and pre-modern times has been the focus of a number of studies. See, for instance, Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*; Dreyfus, "Tibetan Scholastic Education"; Sopa, *Lectures on Tibetan Religious Culture;* Onoda, *Monastic Debate in Tibet*. Havnevik, in her monograph on Tibetan Buddhist nuns (*a ne*; hon. *btsun ma*; *chos lags*), briefly addresses the training of female renunciates in Tibet; see *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns*, 50–55, 114. Most of these studies have addressed aspects of monasticism from eyewitness accounts and ethnographic data, and do not include textual evidence from historical sources in their analysis.

18 Religious affiliation is understood here as a loose and tentative category which can help identify a person's institutional adherence and/or inclination towards a teaching system. As far as my understanding goes, Tibetan religious specialists of the late medieval period engaged in a range of diverse (and often contradictory) practices and studies that had come down to them through different transmissions from teacher to disciple, to a large extent independently from institutional frameworks. They rarely followed a single teaching system in their manifold spiritual endeavours. Thus affiliation in Tibetan Buddhism indicates the adherence of an individual or a collective to a particular teaching tradition, but it does not testify to a definite institutional affiliation, doctrinal outlook or a fixed set of practices and techniques employed. Marta Sernesi kindly made me aware of the fact that monastic ordination should also be taken into account when discussing questions of religious affiliation and identity.

19 As has been attempted for recent comparative studies on medieval monasticism in Europe (Lutter in this section), it would be desirable also to study Tibetan medieval monasteries (with regard to their educational training) by drawing upon the different genres of monastic literature. The curricula could be studied from scholastic text books (*yig cha*) and aspects of its social organization and disciplinary regulations from monastic constitutions (*bca' yig*). An analysis of monasteries' liturgy (*chos spyod*) and manuals for ritual and practice (*cho ga phyag len*), which are still widely extant, would provide new information about monastic programmes as such. Aspects of monasteries' literary culture and text production could be investigated by gathering information about former library holdings and a systematic colophon analysis of surviving block prints and manuscripts.

plateau for more than four centuries (11th-15th cent.).[20] Scholars examining medieval Tibetan monasticism deal largely with fragmentary and implicit forms of evidence; this further reinforces the need to begin research at a micro-historical level of an individual learner, whose activities, also with regard to larger groups and communities, are traceable in available texts.[21] Since it is currently difficult to gather sufficient textual evidence for a comprehensive study of an educational syllabus of a medieval Tibetan monastery, this chapter, as mentioned above, examines the learning of an individual 15th-century Buddhist scholar-adept through his hagiography and his autobiographical "learning account" (*senyig*).

## Sources for Investigation

Tibetan hagiographies, *namthar* (*rnam thar*) in Tibetan, relate the lives of accomplished teachers. These are respectfully given the title *lama* (*bla ma*; "superior") or *rinpoche* (*rin po che*; "Precious One").[22] Believed to possess supernatural powers and command over worldly circumstances through ritual

20 On the monastery of Sangphu as a "centre of gravity", see Hugon's contribution in this section.

21 Previously, scholars drew conclusions about scholastic curricula from biographical data (and the literary output) of students and teachers active at these sites. In the case of the seminary of gSang phu in the sKyid shod area of Central Tibet, see *inter alia* van der Kuijp, *Contributions to the Development of Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology*; Roloff, *Red mda' ba*, 389–90 n. 550 and 392–93 n. 555; Jackson, "Rong ston bKa' bcu pa", 346–50; Jackson et al., *Rong-ston on the Prajñāpāramitā philosophy*, ii, iv, v. Volker Caumanns, largely relying on the hagiographical corpus about Shākya mchog ldan's life, examines in his monograph the syllabus of several scriptural seminaries in Central Tibet, particularly with regard to the master's main site of scholastic training at gSang phu and his later seat at gSer mdog can; see Caumanns, *Der Mahāpaṇḍita des Klosters gSer-mdog-can*. A discussion of monastic curricula and titles is found in Tarab Tulku, *A Brief History of Tibetan Academic Degrees* and Jackson, "Rong ston bKa' bcu pa", as above. J. Willis, who translated the life stories of six early Gelugpa adepts from an 18th-century biographical collection, concludes that "from these accounts, we get a clear sense of what Tibetan monastic education involved"; see Willis, *Enlightened Beings*, 13. In the case of Austrian hagiographical material from the 12th century, C. Lutter, this volume, highlights its value as a source for community life and to understand spiritual models and their relations to monastic community building. See also Ó Riain's contribution to this section.

22 Other titles by which the protagonists are frequently referred to in this genre are *chos* [*kyi*] *rje* (Skt. *dharmasvamin*; "spiritual lord"), *bdag nyid* [*chen po*] (Skt. *mahātmān*; "great being"), *kun mkhyen* (Skt. *sarvajña*; "Omniscient One"), *mgon po* (Skt. *nātha*; "guardian").

expertise and meditative practice, *lama*s not only occupy the highest authority in monastic communities and a prominent status among the Buddhist laity, but are considered by their devotees to be incarnated Buddhas or completely enlightened beings. In the biography of Gongkar Dorjedenpa Kunga Namgyal, also known as Gongkarwa (Gong dkar ba; "the One from Gongkar"), he is repeatedly credited with having attained the highest goal of Buddhahood (*sangs rgyas kyi go 'phang*; Skt. *buddhapada*) in a previous lifetime, a state of omniscience and liberation beyond the human condition of suffering.[23] Due to unbiased compassion for beings exposed to the painful experiences of transmigratory existence (*'khor ba*; Skt. *saṃsāra*), as hagiographical authors further argue, these liberated beings manifest a physical emanation (*sprul sku*; Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*) and descend from the heavenly spheres of the Buddhas "into this realm" (*zhing 'dir*; i.e. this world).[24] As the genre designation suggests, *namthar* record the "liberated" deeds/performances (*rnam* [*par*] *thar* [*pa*]; hon. *mdzad pa*) of an incarnated Buddha who has taken the physical form of a human agent.[25] In this mode of appearance (*tshul bstan pa; tshul mdzad pa*), these biographers write, the saintly masters teach "those [who are] to be tamed/disciplined" (*gdul bya*; Skt. *vineya*) by the "Good Law" (*dam pa'i chos*; Skt. *saddharma*) of the Buddha/s, thereby assisting them in overcoming their unenlightened state.[26] Appealing to the wider community of a master, including his circle of devotees, benefactors, faithful students, monastic inhabitants and future incarnations (*yang srid*; Skt. *punarbhava*), the hagiographies describe the "enlightened activity" ([*mdzad pa*] *'phrin las*) of historically attested teachers, praising them for their achievements in promoting the Buddhist path of liberation. The introduction and concluding parts of

23 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 32, 33, 89–90, 92, 176.

24 Ibid., 9–10, 13, 183–84. The idea of physical emanation, *tulku* in Tibetan, (*sprul sku*; Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*) is to be understood in the context of the cosmological/soteriological model of the "three bodies" (*sku gsum*; Skt. *trikāya*). See also Seyfort Ruegg, *The Life of Bu ston Rin po che*, 47–49. On the concept of reborn masters, see also B. Kellner's introductory section on rebirth lineages in this volume.

25 An early but accurate overview of Tibetan hagiographical writing is found in Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 1:150–70. A thorough synopsis of the diverse genre covering the most important literature on Tibetan life writing recently appeared in *Brill's Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*; see Sernesi, "Biography and Hagiography in Tibet". In comparison to Christian hagiographies, J. Willis argues that the *namthar* surpasses its Western equivalent in depth and richness of the genre, particularly in its role as an instructional account; see *Enlightened Beings,* 5, 20.

26 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 9–10, 32, 90, 176. See also Seyfort Ruegg, *The Life of Bu ston Rin po che*, 44.

hagiographical accounts emphasize the genre's positive impact on the reader: blessing them, fostering their faith, and inspiring them by recounting extracts from the deeds of enlightened individuals who have proven themselves beneficial (*don mdzad*) in their functions as monastic heads, scholarly teachers, ritual adepts, wandering ascetics or solitary hermits.[27] Most of the content of *namthar* texts is presented accordingly, diligently describing a *lama*'s profound commitment to the study and practice of various doctrines (*chos*; Skt. *dharma*) under authorized teachers.

Similarly, the hagiography of Gongkarwa pays particular attention to the exemplary training of its protagonist, providing the reader with many details about his disciplinary observances, daily practice commitments, scriptural studies and contemplative exercises.[28] The hagiographer Gyatön Jangchub Wangyal (rGya ston Byang chub dbang rgyal; 1470-c. 1540s, hereafter Jangchub Wangyal), who compiled the main biography of this eminent teacher from the Gongkar region,[29] presents the complete range of his master's scriptural learning in a lengthy section describing "how [he] relied on venerable tutors and became the possessor of the entire teachings".[30] As his personal servant and close disciple from the Yangpachen (Yangs pa can) quarter of Gongkar Choede monastery, the author probably drew on Gongkarwa's personal learning account to reproduce the content and textual foundation of his teacher's religious training.

Learning accounts (*senyig*) or "records [of teachings] received", *thobyig* (*thob yig*) in Tibetan, are basically lists in which the author records the titles of

27 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 3–4, 7–8, 210. On the inspirational function of Tibetan life writing, see particularly Willis, *Enlightened Beings,* 5, 6, 16, 19; Schaeffer, "Tibetan Biography", 276–77, 292; Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 9–10.

28 See particularly the chapters on Gongkarwa's efficient adaption of pure conduct (*rNam par dag pa'i spyod pa rlabs po che mdzad pa'i skabs*; *Gongkarwa Namthar*, Chapter 6, 32–39), his scriptural mastery under the tutelage of excellent teachers (*Yongs 'dzin dam pa bsten zhing gsung rab kun gyi bdag por gyur pa'i skabs*; ibid., Chapter 7, 39–89), his practice in the "common and the uncommon path" [of the Pāramitāyāna and the Mantrayāna] (*Thun mong dang thun mong ma yin pa'i lam nyams su bzhes pa'i skabs*; ibid., Chapter 8, 89–92) and Chapter 11 on his elucidation of the Buddha's teachings by way of exposition, disputation, and composition (*'Chad rtsod rtsom gsum gyis thub bstan gsal bar mdzad pa'i skabs*; ibid., 151–76).

29 Four hagiographies of this master have survived, of which Jangchub Wangyal's account is the most extensive. His block-printed text of 63 folios (published in 2001 in a modern book format under *rDzong pa kun dga' rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar*) seems to have served as the basis for two shorter biographies in later works of religious history. Taking these as the starting point, D. Jackson provided the first synopsis of Gongkarwa's life three decades ago; see "Notes on Two Early Printed Editions", 10–12.

30 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 39–89 (as in n. 28).

books he has been formally introduced to by his teachers. Compiled by the learners themselves, *senyig*s are first-hand testimonies of their individual text-based education.[31] These personal records, often filling several fascicles in the collected writings (*gsung 'bum*; *bka' 'bum*) of late medieval masters, were written by learners who felt the need to keep track of the scriptural corpus for which they had obtained authorization—in its fullest extent consisting of the permission to read/study a text (*yig cha'i lung*), the ritual empowerment to practice it (*dbang; rjes gnang;* Skt. *abhiṣeka*), and auxiliary instructions (*khrid*; *man ngag*; Skt. *upadeśa*) or explanations (*bshad pa*). With the transmission line of each text documented schematically, the initiate or student establishes himself as an authorized holder of a textual corpus (often representing a particular teaching lineage) that he has received as the last in an unbroken line from teacher to disciple (*bla brgyud;* Skt. *guruparaṃparā*).[32] In addition to the contextual information about a *lama*'s training that can be derived from texts such as hagiographies, personal learning accounts have proven an indispensable source for studying the education of Tibetan masters. Meticulously recording the scriptural foundation upon which the author's religious training was based, *senyig*s can provide clues about a master's doctrinal outlook, his affinity towards a certain exegetical system or the scriptural impact of his teachers.[33] By analysing stylistic features, textual annotations and the arrangement of the contents, the reader can occasionally acquire additional

31 This has already been pointed out by A.I. Vostrikov, *Tibetan Historical Literature*, 199, 202. Despite their rich detail and probable accuracy, these autographic lineage accounts should however not be considered complete with regard to non-tantric doctrines. In reconstructing the scriptural learning of Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456), J. Heimbel notices inconsistencies and incompleteness in the master's *thobyig*; see Heimbel, *Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po*, 142–43, 170–71. Similarly, Gongkarwa's *senyig* does not, for the most part, document the content of studies the author undertook with regard to non-tantric, *sutra* literature.

32 Transmission lineages begin with their originator in the form of the historical Buddha, the transcendental Buddha Vajradhāra or Samantabhadra (in the *gSar ma-* and the *rNying ma* tradition respectively) or the author of a transmitted text. The superiority of the *guru* or lineage master, who holds the highest position in the spiritual hierarchy, is deeply embedded in the iconography of Tibetan art; see Jackson, "Lineages and Structure in Tibetan Buddhist Painting", 10–11, 13. Also Opitz in this volume.

33 For his study on the core doctrines of the Sakya tradition, J. Sobisch drew heavily upon A mes zhabs's (1597–1659) immense literary knowledge preserved in his learning account; see *Hevajra and Lam 'bras Literature*, 9–10, 14. For the study of a single master's transmission, see Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence*, 85–95, 348–55.

information, such as how teaching sessions were structured internally and carried out.[34]

### Tibetan Buddhist Learning (*bslab pa*)

Before presenting a specific reconstruction and description of the training and education of a Tibetan master, I will examine how learning and related undertakings are described in the literary sources. In Tibetan hagiographical literature, which can include eulogies (*bstod pa*) and supplication prayers (*gsol 'debs*), the protagonist's engagement in study and practice is typically depicted in the light of spiritual accomplishments and higher soteriological goals leading toward Buddhahood. While taking biographical details into account, a master's training, be it with regard to scripture, ritual, disciplinary observances, prayer or contemplative techniques, is typically presented in reference to religious ideas and principles as formulated in the normative texts of a tradition.[35] By merging the biographical dimension with a tradition's prevalent discourse, Tibetan hagiographies seem to fulfil two functions for their audience. By recounting the exemplary deeds of an enlightened master, the biographer makes abstract concepts and ideals accessible to the reader. At the same time, by placing the biographical events of a teacher's life within a doctrinal framework, the protagonist is presented as an authentic teacher and representative of the Buddhist tradition.[36] This is reinforced by the master's *senyig*, which—in the case of Gongkarwa—was also worked into the narrative of the hagiography,[37] providing further testimony of how teachings (and their respective texts) were properly imparted to him in a continuous line of transmission.

A classical scheme that biographers frequently take up to illustrate the entirety of their subjects' spiritual training is that of the "Three Trainings" (*bslab pa gsum*; Skt. *triśikṣā, śikṣātraya*), comprising "training in morality",

34 Personal annotations in Gongkarwa's learning account point to the fact that physical texts were actively consulted when granting him reading authorization and empowerment; see, for instance, *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 403, 412, 430.

35 Roughly speaking, normative texts comprise Indian and Tibetan treatises contained in the Tibetan canon (*bka' bstan*) and the para-canonical literature at the core of a monastic tradition.

36 The exemplary and affirmative function of Tibetan hagiographies was pointed out elsewhere (Larrson, *Crazy for Wisdom*, 33; Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 103; Buswell et al., eds., *Paths to Liberation*, 10).

37 See Chapter 7 in *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 40–84 (as in n. 28).

"training in concentration" and "training in insight/knowledge".[38] Gongkarwa is portrayed as having fully mastered the ethical, concentrative and gnostic training of this threefold learning programme of the complete Buddhist path.[39] In terms of Buddhist soteriology, the "Three Trainings" encompass the complete prescribed range of physical, verbal and mental exercises and obligations for reaching liberation through the removal of ignorance (*ma rig pa*; Skt. *avidyā*), which is seen as the source of suffering and continuous rebirth in cyclic existence or *saṃsāra*. Hence of central importance in Buddhism is the cultivation of knowledge/insight (*shes rab*; Skt. *prajñā*) that sees the "ultimate truth" (*don dam bden pa;* Skt. *paramārthasatya*) of how the individual and the phenomenal world exists. The ambition of overcoming the innate lack of knowledge as a means of attaining a state beyond suffering is also expressed in the formula of "hearing, reflection and cultivation" (*thos bsam sgom*; Skt. *śruta-cintā-bhāvanā*), in the various Buddhist traditions a strategy for accessing the religious truth formulated in the diverse teachings of the Buddha.[40] Approaching these teachings through hearing, reflection and cultivation, in this order, is said to lead to three corresponding types of knowledge/insight (*shes rab rnam pa gsum*; Skt. *trividhā prajñā*). The highest of these, required for actual (i.e. transforming) truth experience/s, is reached through techniques of mental cultivation.[41]

Using this standard theme for dispelling the layers of ignorance in the ordinary mind, Jangchub Wangyal recounts his master concerning himself with the various objects of Buddhist learning in a successive process of "hearing,

38 The "Three [Higher] Trainings" ([*lhag pa'i*] *bslabs pa gsum*) summarize the Eight-Fold Noble Path (*'phags pa'i lam yan lag brgyad pa*; Skt. *āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*), which the Buddha taught as the Fourth Noble Truth to bring an end to suffering (i.e. the Third Noble Truth) and to reach liberation from cyclic existence. The unsatisfying human condition formulated in the context of the First and the Second Noble Truths is the rationale for Buddhist practice; see the *Dharmacakrapravartanasūtra*; Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 26–47. For an outline of the "Three Trainings", see ibid., 42–45; Buswell et al., eds., *Paths to Liberation,* 6–7.

39 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 32, 90, 91.

40 A synopsis of the three-fold scheme for attaining knowledge is provided by É. Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 45–46. Jangchub Wangyal quotes the *locus classicus* on the sequence of the three insights from Vasubhandu's *Treasury of Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmakośa*, 6.5ab) to demonstrate his master's accordance with the tradition; see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 90: *tshul gnas thos dang bsam ldan pa/ sgom pa la ni rab tu sbyor*. An interpretation of this classical theme with respect to modern education is found in Samdhong Rinpoche, "Zhib 'jug gi gal gnad", 36.

41 On the sequence of the three *prajñā*s with particular emphasis on the role of reflection (*bsam pa*; Skt. *cintā*), see Eltschinger, *Buddhist Epistemology as Apologetics*, 318–28.

reflecting and cultivating".[42] Interestingly, the wording he uses to describe the different stages in the master's religious undertakings is analogous to the Three Trainings. Religious instruction as such and formal text reception are usually referred to in the narrative by the verb *thos pa* (hon. *gsan pa*; "hear, listen"), implying a "passive" act of text/scriptural acquisition in the sense of simple "hearing" or "listening" (Skt. *śruta*).[43] The study of texts, however, is frequently expressed as *sbyong ba* (hon. *gsan sbyong ba*; "train"), *thos bsam* (hon. ~ *gnang ba*; "listen and reflect") or *slob gnyer ba* ("pursue studies"), words that denote active reflective learning and investigative inquiry into scriptural content.[44] And the master's engagement in contemplative, ritualistic, and yogic techniques relating to the sphere of "cultivation"[45] (*sgom pa*; Skt. *bhāvanā*) are described with verbal forms such as *nyams* [*su*] *bzhes* [*pa*] ("put into experience") or *phyag bzhes* [*su btab pa*] ("[implement in] practice"), indicating "learning" through the practical implementation and adaptation of what is expressed in the scriptures.[46] The author's distinctive language for presenting the master's range of spiritual endeavour in loose analogy to the threefold model of "hearing, reflection and cultivation" reflects the idea of gradual steps in a system of learning that calls for initial authorization through a knowledgeable master and final internalization through application in meditative and yogic practices. This pragmatic notion of the Buddha's teachings—commonly defined as consisting of what has come down through the scriptures (*lung*; Skt. *āgama*), what is to be listened to, and what is realized (*rtogs*; Skt. *adhigama*) through practices of cultivation[47]—is also referred to by Jangchub Wangyal,

42 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 6 and 85. Compare to Seyfort Ruegg, *The Life of Bu ston Rin po che*, 39.

43 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 56, 76–77 (*…lung gsan*), 79 (*…thugs bshad gsan*); *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 235 (*…legs par thos*). The verbal noun *thos pa* (hon. *gsan*) refers to the acquisition of teachings (ibid., 25, 76–77, 85, etc.) and learning in a general sense, e.g. *rgya chen thos pa*; see ibid., 39.

44 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 8, 90 (*…thos bsam gyis*), 58 (*…thos bsam mdzad*), 77 (*…mkhas par mdzad*), 78 (*…gsan sbyong mdzad*), 82 (*…thos bsam gnang; …gsan sbyong dpyis phyin pa*), 155, 156 (*…legs par sbyangs*); *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 402, 406 (*…slob gnyer bgyis*).

45 Here I follow a broader definition of the term *bhāvanā*, not limited to meditative and contemplative practices *per se*, but comprising a whole range of activities conducive to the soteriological goals formulated in Buddhism; see Sponberg, "Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism", 19–20.

46 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 32, 89 (*…thugs nyams su bzhes*), 26 (*…phyag bzhes su btab*).

47 A definition of *lung rtogs* is found in Vasubhandu's *Treasury of Abhidharma Autocommentary* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, 8.39). The idea of mastering the Buddhist teachings by means of theoretical encounter and experimental realization is likewise referred to by the term *bshad sgrub* ("explanation and accomplishment"); see *Gongkarwa*

who makes it clear that Gongkarwa mastered them all, both theoretically and practically.[48]

Another way in which Gongkarwa's learning of Buddhist doctrine and applied practice is presented by his biographer is in the context of the overarching Mahāyāna soteriology. In line with Tibetan Buddhism, Jangchub Wangyal presents his master as adhering to the "common path [of the Mahāyāna]" (*lam thun mong ba*), that is, the "Perfection Vehicle" (Phar phyin gyi theg pa; Skt. Pāramitāyāna), while employing the efficient techniques of the "Secret Mantra" (*gsangs sngags*; Skt. *mantra*).[49] Here the programme of learning that is laid out for the Perfection Vehicle covers the "Six Perfections" (*pha rol tu phyin pa drug*; Skt. *ṣaṭpāramitā*), whereas the training of the "uncommon path" of the Mantra- or Vajrayāna (gSang sngags rDo rje theg pa) is said to comprise the stages related to the ten yogic practices (*rnal 'byor bcu'i rim pa*).[50] The Six Perfections define the training of a bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'*), the Mahāyāna aspirant who follows its six fields of conduct in order to attain Buddhahood.[51] In the context of the non-tantric Mahāyāna, a bodhisattva's learning is said to extend over a series of lives and cosmic aeons; it is not concluded within a single human lifetime. In view of this progressive journey toward enlightenment, a course of successive realization stages is laid out in "Ten Levels" (*sa bcu;* Skt. *daśabhūmi*) corresponding to the "Five Paths" (*lam lnga*; Skt. *pañcamārga*) of practice.[52] According to the major Indo-Tibetan

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*Namthar*, 107, 109, 148, etc. On the "spiritual pragmatism" in Buddhism, see Dreyfus, "Tibetan Scholastic Education", 51; Buswell et al., eds., *Paths to Liberation*, 3–6.

48 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 151.

49 See ibid., 33, 85, 90–91.

50 See ibid., 90–91. The "Ten Yogas" (*rnal 'byor bcu*) are likely to be understood in the context of the contemplative practice of Hevajra (*kye rdor mngon rtogs*; Skt. *hevajra-abhisamaya*). The Sakya hierarch bSod nams rtse mo (1142–1182) explains them as consisting of the practice applications of the "Two Stages" (*rim* [*pa*] *gnyis*; Skt. *dvikrama*), i.e. the "generation stage" (*bskyed rim*; Skt. *utpattikrama*) and the "completion stage" (*rdzogs rim*; Skt. *sampannakrama*), complemented with a set of eight conducts (*spyod lam*) to be pursued in daily life between the actual practice sessions (i.e. *mnyam par ma bzhag pa'i rnal 'byor*); see *dPal kye'i rdo rje'i mngon par rtogs pa yan lag bzhi pa*, in Sakya Centre et al., eds., *The Collected Works of the Founding Masters of Sa-skya*, 5:68.

51 The "Six Perfections" comprise (1) giving, (1) discipline, (3) patience, (4) vigour, (5) meditative concentration and (6) insight/knowledge, and can be understood in the framework of the "Three Trainings"; see Asaṅga's *Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras* (*Mahāyānasūtrālaṁkāra*, 16.7). A definition of the perfections with its soteriological effects is given in Nāgārjuna's *Jewel Garland* (*Ratnāvalī*, 5.35–39).

52 On the "Five Paths" and the "Ten Levels", see the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*. On different doctrinal models that conceptualize the Buddhist path (Skt. *mārga*) leading its follower to

treatises that discuss the bodhisattva's conduct (*byang sems kyi kun spyod*), after long training and familiarization with the enlightened attitude, learning has been completed upon reaching the eighth bodhisattva level and with it, the "Path of Non-Learning" (*mi slob pa'i lam*; Skt. *aśaikṣamārga*). In line with this, Gongkarwa is reported to have traversed the respective "levels and paths" (of the Perfection Vehicle) and the "Two Stages" (of the Secret Mantra) and attained the state of the Buddha Vajrasattva.[53] As a means of speeding up the lengthy learning process in the "common" Mahāyāna (i.e. Pāramitāyāna), applying powerful esoteric techniques pertaining to the "uncommon path" (i.e. Vajrayāna) outlined in the *tantra*s (*rgyud*) receives particular attention in the soteriological process of Tibetan Buddhism.[54] Jangchub Wangyal's account leads to an understanding of learning that embraces the attainment of the spiritual abilities and higher realization that led his protagonist over previous lifetimes to omniscient Buddhahood. In other words, the stereotypical depiction of a master's learning in Tibetan hagiographies emphasizes its soteriological function as a gradual training (exoteric and esoteric) in cognitive correction and altruistic transformation. However, this can include disciplines in addition to the soteriological aspects of the Six Perfections, the Three Trainings and the Stages of Yogic Practices. Based on the classical model of Indian scholarship, Tibetans adopted a system of scholastic learning that is divided into five major and minor "Branches of Knowledge" (*rig* [*pa'i*] *gnas*; Skt. *vidyāsthāna*).[55]

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salvation, see Buswell et al., eds., *Paths to Liberation*, 1–36. According to the Tibetan historiography, for their soteriological framework "the Tibetans" have built on the Indian-Buddhist tradition, which—in contrast to the Chinese doctrinal view—assumes the eventual goal of enlightenment to be achieved by a gradual approach. On the idea of gradual progression in spiritual practice and its presentation in successive steps of training, see also Roesler, *Frühe Quellen zum buddhistischen Stufenweg in Tibet*, 9–18, 32–47.

53 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 92. The "Yogas of the Two Stages" (*rim gnyis rnal 'byor*), that is, the generation stage and the completion stage, define the framework of Gongkarwa's tantric learning; see ibid., 32, 90–91.

54 The "common path" (*lam thun mong ba*) refers to the non-tantric Mahāyāna based on the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s (i.e. Pāramitāyāna), whereas the "uncommon path" (*lam thun mong ma yin pa*) designates the esoteric Mahāyāna of the *tantra*s (*rgyud*), i.e. the Mantra- or Vajrayāna. The tantric path is also referred to by various epithets in Gongkarwa's biography; see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 153, 157 (*bstan pa'i yang snying;* "the very core of the teachings"), 6, 8, 10, 94 (*bstan pa khyad par;* "the eminent teachings"), 153 (*bla na med pa'i lam srol*; "the unsurpassable tradition").

55 On these classical Indian sciences, see Seyfort Ruegg, *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel*, Part two, 93–147 (Science religieuse et sciences séculières en Inde et au Tibet: Vidyāstāna Indo-Bouddhiques et Rig gnas Indo-Tibétains—remarques sur la nature et les finalités des études indo-tibétaines); a listing of the "Five Branches of Knowledge" (*rig gnas lnga*; Skt.

In addition to the Buddhist subjects subsumed in the category of "Inner Knowledge" (*nang don rig pa*; Skt. *adhyātmavidyā*) covering dogmatics and soteriology, this scheme also contains traditional forms of Indic knowledge (i.e. arts and crafts, medicine, grammar, logic, etc.) that are not exclusively Buddhist in origin and do not have soteriological goals. Nonetheless, due to the inclusive approach of the Mahāyāna (which prescribes the well-being of all sentient beings as its goal), these conventional subjects are to be fully integrated into the training of a bodhisattva.[56] In this regard, Gongkarwa's life story states, rather self-evidently, that he studied the various subjects of the "conventional sciences" (*tha snyad kyi gtsug lag;* i.e. *rig pa'i gnas*) properly[57] before beginning to teach others, by means of "exposition, debate and composition" (*'chad rtsod rtsom*), the "three activities of a scholar" (*mkhas pa'i bya ba rnam gsum*).[58]

To sum up, Gongkarwa is described by his biographer as having trained himself in line with the above paradigms, although he had perfected the various stages of learning and accomplishment even before entering his present existence. Jangchub Wangyal portrays his master as being endowed with the qualities of "erudition, venerability and benevolence" (*mkhas btsun bzang*)[59] and frequently praises him as a second Buddha,[60] spiritually accomplished and knowledgeable about the ultimate nature of the phenomenal world. The religious training recorded in his biography thus needs to be seen in the context of the genre's meta-narrative retelling of excerpts from the exemplary deeds of an enlightened teacher who incarnated voluntarily for no other reason than to

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*pañca vidyāstāna*) is given in ibid., 102. On their implementation and role for traditional monastic curricula, see Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 101–03. Dreyfus also compares the normative curriculum of Tibetan scholasticism with similar models found in Christianity and Islam; see ibid., 103–06.

56 In the case of medicine (*gso ba'i rig pa*; Skt. *cikitsāvidyā*) and arts and crafts (*bzo rig pa*; Skt. *karmasthānavidyā*) for the sake of giving aid to others, but in the case of grammar (*sgra rig pa*; Skt. *śabdavidyā*) and logic (*gtan tshigs rig pa*; Skt. *hetuvidyā*) to defeat the opponents of the Buddha's teachings; see ibid., 101; Krasser, "Are Buddhist Pramāṇavādins non-Buddhistic?", 135–37. According to the Indian master Śāntideva (8th cent. AD), the scope of learning for a Mahāyāna follower goes even further, concluding that "there is nothing whatsoever a bodhisattva should not be trained in". See *Entering the Bodhisattva's Conduct* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 100ab).

57 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 26, 86, 156.

58 See ibid., 8, 36–37. For a detailed presentation, see Chapter 11 on Gongkarwa's teaching activity by way of the exposition, disputation, and composition; ibid. 151–76 (as in n. 28). Compare with Seyfort Ruegg, *The Life of Bu ston Rin po che*, 39.

59 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 36, 86, 107.

60 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 7, 25, 37, 107, 175.

assist and instruct other beings in overcoming suffering. The readership seems to understand the retelling of the master's learning (and instruction) as a testimony to his liberated performance on this earth, undertaken with the intention of elucidating the proper Buddhist path and its result (i.e. Buddhahood).[61] In fact, all of his involvement, whether "spiritual" or "worldly", is seen in the light of his completely liberated status and as a compassionate means to set others on the beneficent path (*lam*) that he had already traversed.

## Educational Training of Gongkar Kunga Namgyal (Gongkarwa) (1432–1496)

### *Biographical Context*

Gongkar Dorjedenpa Kunga Namgyal, also known as Dranga Gyalpo (Grwa lnga rgyal po) or just Gongkarwa, lived during the religiously highly productive period of the 15th century. He was born into a noble family that controlled the fertile region of Yargyab (Yar rgyab) on the southern banks of the Yarlung Tsangpo River in present-day Lhokha (Shānnán Prefecture).[62] During the hegemonial rule of the Rlangs Phag mo gru pa (1354-c. 1480), the Yargyab family, who claimed descent from the ancestral line of Thon mi Sam bho ṭa (6th/7th cent. AD),[63] had risen to become a powerful ruling house in the Ü province (dBus) of Central Tibet/Ütsang. In view of a prospective political

61 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 13, 151–52. Due to the fact that great masters are presumed to have attained enlightenment prior to their present existence, Tibetan biographers portray them as deliberately demonstrating a spiritual quest under human conditions. Hence, cosmologically speaking, a *namthar* does not present a path leading to Buddhahood as the common translations of "liberation story" or "story of liberation" suggest, but the performances (*rnam* [*par*] *thar* [*pa*]; hon. *mdzad rnam*) and activities (*mdzad* [*pa*] *'phrin* [*las*]) that evolve from it. In colloquial language the terms *mdzad pa* and *mdzad 'phrin* still carry this notion of benevolent agency of proficient beings. Furthermore, considering the author's declaration (*rtsom pa'i dam bca'*) to recount excerpts from the extensive activities resulting from the protagonist's liberation, the quasi-historical *namthar* text can be well understood literally as an "[account of] liberated [performance/s]"; see also the direct translations of the term *rnam thar* in Seyfort Ruegg, *The Life of Bu ston Rin po che*, 92, 128.

62 According to the life story of Byams pa gling pa bSod nams rnam rgyal (1400–1475), the Yargyab territory stretched from the mountain range of Jo mo Kha rag in the west to [the temple of] Bya sa (near rTsed/s thang) in the east; *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fol. 5a.

63 The genealogical lineage of the Yargyab house up to the 15th century is recorded in *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 14–16; *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fols. 3b–5a.

career, Gongkarwa is said to have received a comprehensive literary education in secular subjects. In his early teens he was entrusted with political duties: at the age of 13 (wood-mouse year; i.e. 1444) he was appointed the "great officer" (*dpon chen*) of Yargyab[64] and two years later (fire-tiger year; i.e. 1446) given the post of the "district officer" (*rdzong dpon*) of the Gongkar estates, which had previously been administered by his father and grandfather.[65] From an early age, Gongkarwa, benefiting from noble family descent (*rigs rus cho 'brang phun tshogs pa*) and enjoying the esteemed position of a territorial ruler (*sa skyong*),[66] must have come into close contact with the venerated masters and religious authorities who visited the family court. Thus his religious education naturally began with instruction from teachers who were invited to render services and give spiritual advice to the ruling family in Yargyab and Gongkar. Three masters from the closer vicinity are commonly credited as his main teachers, each imparting their respective teaching systems to Gongkarwa.[67] Occupied with the duties of a secular ruler, Gongkarwa is portrayed as having approached monastic life gradually. At the age of 20 he took the five precepts of a lay follower; only about a decade later did he receive his monastic ordination. In 1464 (wood-monkey year), at the age of 33, he began the construction of a large monastic site opposite the Gongkar palace, from where he (had earlier?) wielded power.[68] At the age of 43 (wood-horse year), ten years after founding the monastery of Gongkar Dorjeden (or Gongkar Choede) and supposedly after having withdrawn from secular affairs, Gongkarwa took the vows for full ordination in a large ceremonial gathering at his religious seat.[69] Until his death, Gongkarwa stayed in

64 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 24–25; *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fol. 31a.

65 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 25.

66 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 13–14, 27.

67 Gedun Rabsal lists Brag thog pa bSod nams bzang po (*fl.* mid-15th cent.), Byams pa gling pa bSod nams rnam rgyal (1400–1475) and Shar chen Ye shes rgya mtsho (1404–1473) in his modern account of the monastic tradition of Gongkar Choede; *Gong dkar chos sde dgon pa'i lo rgyus,* fols. 2b-3a; see also Jackson, "Notes on Two Early Printed Editions", 11. Sakya masters such as Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507) or Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456), who were mainly active in the gTsang region at the time, are reported to have relied on a handful of main teachers; see Heimbel, *Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po*, 79; Caumanns, "Paṇ chen Shākya mchog ldan's Monastic Seat", 67, n. 9. Gongkarwa's hagiography itself enumerates 24 teachers in total who can be identified as prominent masters coming from or residing in the wider region; see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 84.

68 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 108–13.

69 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 29–31; *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 137; *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fol. 68a–b.

close contact with the religious dignitaries and teachers who were members of the various monasteries and teaching lineages in the wider region, continuing his intense learning in the second part of this life. By the time he passed away (fire-dragon year; i.e. 1496), his monastic community seems to have been well established. Jangchub Wangyal, in the biography of his master, reports that a group of several hundred tantric celibates performed the funeral rites at the monastery for their deceased teacher.[70] As the founder of Gongkar Dorjeden he is remembered as the first *tulku* (*sprul sku*; "emanational embodiment") in the line of the Gongkar Dorjedenpa incarnations, who continue to enjoy the highest authority at the monastery and are considered to return to their community in the form of successive reincarnations (*sku 'phreng*) up to the present day.[71]

### *Gongkarwa's Programme of Learning*

The learning programme of Gongkarwa consisted of five major fields of engagement: (1) language, (2) disciplinary codes, (3) non-tantric subjects, (4) tantric subjects, and (5) visionary experiences. The following synopsis will ignore the chronology of events as well as the fact that these subject areas are strongly interconnected and were certainly not studied or practised independently of one another.[72] It rather aims at portraying the founder's vast range of religious training, which has continued to shape the monastic tradition at Gongkar Choede until the present day.

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70 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 188–89. The enormous size of the main assembly hall (*'du khang, khyams chen*) resting on 64 pillars (*Gongkarwa Namthar*, 105, 137) supports the assumption that Gongkar Choede was a highly populated enclave in its early phase of existence. Parts of the large assembly hall were customarily reserved for the arrangement (*sbrengs*) of sand-coloured *maṇḍala*s throughout the religious year; personal communication with ex-monk of pre-1959 Gongkar Choede (Fieldwork India, 2015). See also *rDo rje gdan gyi sgrub mchod dus bzhi'i dkyil 'khor dang phyag len mdzad pa po kha gsal dang bcas pa* (as in n. 11).

71 A small exile branch of Gongkar Choede became established near Dehradun (India) in the late 1990s for the sole purpose of offering the present Dorjedenpa *tulku* bsTan 'dzin 'jam dpal lung rtogs (b. 1977), who had reincarnated as a boy in north-eastern India, a seat to safeguard his monastic tradition.

72 For the sake of illustration I have adopted here the traditional division of the Buddha's scriptures into either *sūtra* or *mantra* teachings (*mdo sngags* [*kyi bstan pa*]); see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 152, 156. A chronological analysis of Gongkarwa's learning together with a survey of his literary oeuvre was presented in my unpublished M. A. thesis "The Life and Works of Gong dkar rDo rje gdan pa Kun dga' rnam rgyal (1432–1496)" (University of Hamburg, 2009).

### *Language Training* (*Reading and Writing*)

Not much is known about Gongkarwa's basic acquisition of literacy. As in the other extant hagiographies, Jangchub Wangyal's lengthy account does not provide any details about his language instructors or the contents and process of his early education. The author stereotypically refers to his master's innate literary talent by stating that he learned reading and writing without great effort or obstacles.[73] Given the fact that, in preparation for a political career, Gongkarwa is reported to have studied secular and historical matters in his youth, there is good reason to assume that the boy enjoyed intensive literary training in a secular environment.[74] The sources reveal little more about his study of Sanskrit. Two of Gongkarwa's close teachers were involved in text translation projects in collaboration with Indian *pundits* visiting Tibet at the time, and it was under their direction that Gongkarwa became proficient in the Indic script, later enabling him to pursue some of his textual studies on the basis of Indian originals (*rgya gzhung*).[75] Under the tutorship of his ordination teacher Byams pa gling pa bSod nams rnam rgyal (1400–1475), a member of the Yargyab family and an accomplished scholar,[76] Gongkarwa was trained in grammar (*sgra*) on the basis of classical Indian grammatical treatises such as the *Kalāpasūtra*, the *Chandoratnākara* and the *Kāvyādarśa*.[77] In addition, Gongkarwa studied the Indian grammatical system extensively with the celebrated "translator from Tagtsang", sTag tshang lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen (b. 1405), again relying on the *Kalāpasūtra* and similar treatises.[78]

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73 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 23. Also in his learning account, Gongkarwa does not provide any information about his elementary training.

74 This early training was based on secular treatises of Indian and Tibetan authorship (*rgya bod kyi 'jig rten lugs kyi bstan bcos;* Skt. *nītiśāstra*) such as Nāgārjuna's *Nītiśāstrajantupoṣaṇabindu*, Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Elegant Sayings* (*Sa skya legs bshad*), as well as works of Indian and Tibetan history (*rgya bod kyi rgyal rabs*) and the *Eight Investigations* (*brtag pa brgyad*); see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 23–24.

75 Sanskrit renderings of Tibetan names and his mention of consulting Indian manuscripts point to his proficiency in the Indic script; see for instance *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 52, 71, 79, 82. Also ibid., 3, 5, 46, 198, 375.

76 Owing to his profound knowledge of the five traditional sciences (*rig gnas lnga*), he was commonly addressed with the title of "great scholar" (*paṇḍi ta chen po*, *paṇ chen*; Skt. *mahāpaṇḍita*); see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 29. Byams gling paṇ chen is portrayed as an outstanding expert in Indic and Tibetan grammar who fostered many students; see *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fols. 74a–75a.

77 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 58. These studies are not mentioned in Gongkarwa's learning account. For the year 1474 (wood-horse year) he is reported to have still been receiving instructions on Sanskrit paradigms; see *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fol. 68b.

78 *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 402; *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 77.

### *Disciplinary Codes* (*Buddhist Precepts*)

Gongkarwa began his spiritual career, under his birth name Dranga Gyalpo, as a tantric lay practitioner (*sngags 'chang*; Skt. *mantradhara*). In several successive steps over a period of more than two decades he gradually assumed Buddhist precepts from two of his main *lama*s, Byams pa gling pa bSod nams rnam rgyal of the Yargyab family and Brag thog pa bSod nams bzang po from the nearby monastery of Brag thog. From the latter, Gongkarwa received the vows of a layperson (*dge bsnyen*; Skt. *upāsaka*) at the age of 20 (iron-sheep year; i.e. 1451), together with an interim ordination (*bar ma rab byung*). The hagiography reveals that, despite his great desire to take monastic ordination at that time, Gongkarwa took only the provisional vows of interim ordination owing to the objections of his mother.[79] Having pursued yogic practices for many years while performing secular duties at Gongkar, he became a renunciate monk and received the ordination name Kunga Namgyal Pelsangpo (Kun dga' rnam rgyal dpal bzang po) with the monastic precepts from bSod nams rnam rgyal in 1460 (iron-dragon year).[80] Three years later (water-sheep year; i.e. 1463) he again approached his ordination teacher to request taking the vows of a novice (*dge tshul*; Skt. *śramaṇera*),[81] and a decade later, in 1474 (wood-horse year), to take the vows of a fully ordained monk (*dge slong*; Skt. *bhikṣu*).[82] Putting into practice the disciplinary rules (*bslab pa'i gnas*) involved in receiving these respective sets of precepts,[83] Gongkarwa also undertook scriptural studies, approaching the subject of monastic precepts from a doctrinal direction, with Byams chen rab 'byams pa Sangs rgyas 'phel (1412–1485) and his Sanskrit tutor Shes rab rin chen, using the *Vinayasūtra* of Guṇaprabha as the basis for his studies.[84] For his monastic ordination in 1460(?), his late

79 See ibid., 28–29.

80 The ordination ceremony took place at dGa' ldan lha rtse in the gZhung valley; see *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fol. 45a–b. It is, however, not reported in Gongkarwa's main biography. Furthermore, Jangchub Wangyal ascribes the bestowal of his master's ordination name to Brag thog pa bSod nams bzang po; *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 28–29.

81 This time he invited his teacher to the rNam rgyal rab brtan estate in the gZhung valley; see *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fol. 46b. Jangchub Wangyal dates the novice ordination already to 1458 (earth-tiger year) and does not mention a separate event for the year 1463; see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 29.

82 *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fol. 68a–b; *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 29–31. See also *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 137.

83 His dedication to the observance of precepts is poetically illustrated by Jangchub Wangyal in *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 31–32.

84 The *Vinayasūtra* seems to have been part of the "Four Great Scriptures" (*bka' chen bzhi*), which Byams chen rab 'byams pa bestowed upon him; see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 82. On its

ordination teacher bSod nams rnam rgyal personally instructed him in explanations of the different codes of monastic life (*'dul ba;* Skt. *vinaya*).[85] Gongkarwa's successive reception of precepts, culminating in his full ordination as a *bhikṣu*, reflects the intensification of his religious life and his gradual change from a non-ordained lay practitioner in political service to a celibate monk, monastic founder and religious authority.

### *Training in Non-Tantric (Exoteric) Subjects*

With regard to exoteric subjects, that is non-tantric doctrines pertaining to the literature of the *sūtra*s (*mdo*) and the conventional sciences (*rig* [*pa'i*] *gnas*; *tha snyad kyi gtsug lag*), Gongkarwa engaged in wide-ranging scholastic studies, mainly under the guidance of scholars from the Sakyapa (Sa skya pa) tradition.[86] Under Shes rab dpal ldan, the incumbent abbot of the Gling smad college at Sangphu, he studied Middle-Way philosophy (*dbu ma*; Skt. *madhyamaka*) and epistemology (*tshad ma*; Skt. *pramāṇa*), the latter on the basis of Sa skya Paṇḍita's (1182–1251) *Mine of Reasoning* with its auto-commentary (*Rigs gter rang 'grel*).[87] The above-mentioned Sakya scholar Byams chen rab 'byams pa Sangs rgyas 'phel provided Gongkarwa with training in the "Four Great Scriptures" (*bka' chen bzhi*), a group of Indian key texts that were studied at scriptural seminaries at the time.[88] Likewise, sTag tshang lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen introduced his disciple to the large text corpus of the *Twenty Treatises Associated with Maitreya* (*Byams pa dang 'brel ba'i chos sde nyi shu*) and numerous teaching cycles of the Kadampa (bKa' gdams pa) sect.[89] While the contents for most of his study of the "Vehicle of Dialectics"[90] is not specified, the

study under the guidance of Lo chen Shes rab rin chen from sTag tshang chos 'khor sgang monastery, see *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 78; *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 405–06. On the collective of the *Four Great Scriptures,* see n. 88.

85 *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fol. 45a–b.

86 Here the practice of memorization is an integral part of Tibetan monastic training and scholasticism; it is principally organized around the study of Indian root texts and its commentarial literature; see Miller, "Educational Practices of Tibetan Lama Training", 242–43; Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 91.

87 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 82; *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 25–26.

88 The subjects of the *bka' chen bzhi* comprise the Six Perfections, epistemology, cosmology and monastic discipline. See Jackson, "Rong ston bKa' bcu pa", 346–47; Dreyfus, "Tibetan Scholastic Education", 144; Roloff, *Red mda' ba*, 392; Onoda, *Monastic Debate in Tibet*, 29; Tarab Tulku, *A Brief History of Tibetan Academic Degrees*, 11.

89 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 78; *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 408ff.

90 The "Vehicle of Dialectics" (mTshan nyid kyi theg pa; Skt. Lakṣaṇayāna) comprises exclusively exoteric subjects pertaining to the *sūtras.*

scholastic training Gongkarwa completed under sTag tshang lo tsā ba is well documented.[91]

Also with regard to his learning of exoteric subjects, Gongkarwa received the complete reading transmission (*lung*) of the Tibetan Buddhist canon. bKa' 'gyur ba Shākya rgyal mtshan conferred upon his student from Gongkar 30 volumes from the *sūtra* and 16 volumes of the *vinaya* section of the Kanjur (*bKa' 'gyur*), the collection containing the "translated word [of the Buddha]".[92] Having obtained the *lung* for the Tibetan canonical text-collections (i.e. the *bKa' 'gyur* and *bsTan 'gyur*) from Shākya rgyal mtshan, Gongkarwa is remembered as one of its greatest transmitters.[93] As for studies in the traditional sciences (*rig* [*pa'i*] *gnas*; *tha snyad kyi gtsug lag*), Jangchub Wangyal enumerates arts and crafts (*bzo*; Skt. *śilpakarmasthāna*), medicine (*gso*; Skt. *cikitsā*), grammar (*sgra*; Skt. *śabda*), epistemology (*tshad ma*; Skt. *pramāṇa*), poetry (*snyan dngags*; Skt. *kāvya*), metrics (*sdeb sbyor*; Skt. *chandas*), lexicography ([*ming gi*] *mngon brjod*; Skt. *abhidhāna*), poetical embellishment (*tshig gi rgyan*; Skt. *alaṃkāra*) and astrology (*skar rtsis*; Skt. *jyotis*, *gaṇita*), but does not specify the textual basis for any of these studies.[94]

### *Training in Tantric (Esoteric) Subjects*

In addition to the doctrines of the *sūtra*s, Gongkarwa undertook esoteric studies based on the scriptural corpus of the *tantra*s (*rgyud*). His biography and learning account portray him as a tantric-adept scholar who committed himself to extensive training in the Vajrayāna. Gongkarwa is reported to have obtained authorization for practices associated with the various meditational (*yi dam*) and protective deities (*chos skyong*) from an early stage in his life. Under the spiritual care of his first teachers, as summed up by Jangchub Wangyal, he successfully undertook rites of "invocation and realization" (*bsnyen sgrub*; Skt. *sevāsādhana*) and gained fame as an accomplished lay practitioner, known at the time by the name of "Fearless Hero" ('Jigs med dpa' bo).[95] The wide range of his learning in this field is demonstrated not only by his voluminous *senyig*, but also from personal notes (*zin bris*) recording his

91 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 77–78; *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 402–13.

92 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 63–66; *Gongkarwa Senyig*, 217–57, 265–68. Note that Gongkarwa's training in the Buddhist monastic code (i.e. *vinaya*), a subject that is traditionally classified under the category of non-tantric literature, is listed above.

93 See Jackson, "Notes on Two Early Printed Editions", 12 and 23 n. 28.

94 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 26, 86, 156.

95 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 25–26, 93–95; Jackson, "Notes on Two Early Printed Editions", 11.

everyday practices, all of which were later incorporated into his hagiography.[96] Teachers of the different lineages that had reached Tibet in the earlier (8th-9th cent.) and later phases (after the 10th cent.) of the Buddhist dissemination granted Gongkarwa authorization of their scriptures and the connected deity practices. Under their guidance Gongkarwa received a broad training in the various forms of tantric practice (including *maṇḍala* practice, deity yoga, ritual dance, etc.) of the old and new *tantra*s (i.e. *gsar ma* and *rnying ma*). To mention only a few of his tutors in this regard,[97] it was his chief *lama* Brag thog pa bSod nams bzang po and his nephew Brag thog pa dPal 'dzin bzang po who passed on the main teaching cycles of the Sakyapa to him, such as its core teachings, the *Path with the Result* (Lam 'bras), and the *Collected Works* of the five great Sakya founders (*Sa skya bka' 'bum*). For the Shalu (Zhwa lu) tradition, Gongkarwa gained expertise in the Shalu ritual system from Shar chen Ye shes rgya mtsho (1404–1473), particularly with regard to the *Yogatantra*s (*rNal 'byor kyi rgyud*). From Shes rab dPal ldan of Sangphu and the sNe'u gdong official Drung chen Kun bzang rtse pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1417–1487), Gongkarwa received instruction in the teachings of the *Great Perfection* (rDzogs chen) and central doctrines of the Nyingma (rNying ma) and Kagyu (bKa' brgyud) sects. Further teachings from the Kagyu lineage and its sub-sects were imparted to him by lineage holders of the rNgog clan in the gZhung valley, the abbot of the mTshal min *gompa* in Dol and the *yogin* Bo dong Ras chen pa dPal 'byor bzang po, who is described as an expert in the Bodong (Bo dong) and Shangpa (Shangs pa) doctrines. Dus zhabs pa Don grub kun dga' from the Tsang province (gTsang) and Byams pa gling pa bSod nams rnam rgyal were responsible for introducing him to the teachings of the Kālacakra and its system of astrology.

### *Visionary Experiences*

In addition to the above-mentioned encounters with teachers from the various traditions, Jangchub Wangyal recounts that Gongkarwa also received spiritual knowledge through direct visionary experiences. While on a meditative retreat at a solitary place called dBen gnas Yid bde tshal, Gongkarwa is said to have beheld a vision in which the Indian *yogin* Virūpa (7th or 8th cent. AD) explained

96 See *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 33–35. The section begins: *des na zhag re'i thugs dam gyi rim pa ni...*

97 For a detailed listing of the teachings Gongkarwa received from the individual masters, see Chapter 7 in his *namthar* (as in n. 28) and the respective sections of his learning account.

some difficult points related to the *Path with the Result*.[98] In another instance it is reported that the protector deity Pañjaranātha Mahākāla appeared to him in the form of a black person who then showed him the choreography of a ritual dance. It was on the basis of this visionary instruction, Jangchub Wangyal reports, that Gongkarwa taught a group of tantric initiates the sequence of this protector's dance and later composed a dance manual on it.[99]

## Concluding Remarks

Focusing primarily on the phenomenon of learning, this chapter has analysed the hagiography (*namthar*) and autobiographical learning account (*senyig*) of Gongkar Dorjedenpa Kunga Namgyal. Jangchub Wangyal, who compiled the life story of this 15th-century master from southern Central Tibet, addresses the issue of learning mainly in the context of rhetorics related to the Buddhist path leading to liberation and omniscience. Except for a lengthy section recording Gongkarwa's scriptural training, which seems to be derived from the *lama*'s personal *senyig*, for the most part the narrative outlines the protagonist's course of training in a very generic way. Drawing on soteriological models, which are illustrated by means of doctrinal definitions and religious imagery, he leaves the historical context and practical aspects of the master's education largely unstated. Apart from central events in Gongkarwa's monastic career (i.e. the acceptance of precepts), the hagiography rarely contextualizes the *lama*'s training regarding time or place. Thus the study of Gongkarwa's hagiography does not shed light on educational activities at Tibetan monastic enclaves as such. Nonetheless, the biography, through its generic character and laudatory style, conveys something that is no less relevant for understanding medieval Tibetan-Buddhist learning. In the narrative, a clear image emerges of the prevailing vision of learning as well as the role of those who accomplished it and those who seek it. Learning accounts, like that by Gongkarwa, testify to the fact that the form of Buddhism found in Tibet is built on a system of text-based learning that is centred on teachers who are given the key role in its

98 *Gongkarwa Namthar,* 100–01. According to natives from Lhokha, the site of Yid bde tshal can be located some 3.5 km to the south of Gongkar Choede monastery (Fieldwork, Tibet 2010).

99 *Gongkarwa Namthar*, 97, 161. An old, finely-written *dbu med* manuscript (3 ff.) of Gongkarwa's dance ritual was recently re-discovered in Tibet. The title reads *Pu tra ming sring ru 'dren dang bcas pa'i 'chams yig sngags 'chang 'jigs med dpa' bos mdzad pa.*

dissemination. Access to spiritual knowledge lies with those who have received formal authorization from their teachers and who are part of an unbroken line of transmission. Perceived by their (community of) followers as proficient individuals who are in charge of the teachings (*bstan pa'i bdag po*) and hold the textual transmission (*brgyud 'dzin*), respectively, it is not surprising that historical narratives pay special attention to these figures and their learning. It is the spiritual teacher, and with him the textual corpus he holds (often related to larger sectarian orders and monastic institutions), that is of central importance for the religious seeker.[100] The *namthar*s and *senyig*s of Tibetan masters accurately mirror this, particularly with regard to esoteric teachings, which require formal initiation rites.[101] The location where instruction takes place and the precise occasion of it being conferred are often soteriologically irrelevant for the recipient and of marginal significance for the traditional reader. As Jangchub Wangyal reveals in his ahistorical style of narration, whether events are described in a geographic or social context lies solely with the biographer's preferences.[102] The hagiography of Gongkarwa's ordination teacher Byams pa gling pa bSod nams rnam rgyal, for example, is quite different from that of his student: it precisely documents the wider context and chronology of its protagonist's life. Interestingly, it is from this detailed account that we gain information about the locations of Gongkarwa's spiritual education. In fact, this text gives the impression that Gongkarwa—before being ordained and withdrawing from the political arena—received most of his religious education at secular sites that he visited or from which he invited teachers for spiritual council, rites and instruction.[103]

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100 The superiority of the spiritual teachers who are considered to be embodiments of enlightenment also found expression in Tibetan ideas of governance see B. Kellner in this volume. Also Seyfort Ruegg, *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel*, Part one, 13–92 (Matériaux pour l'histoire des fonctions de l'officiant-précepteur donataire et du roi donateur et de leur relation dite yon mchod/mchod yon).

101 In addition to written evidence, the documentation of lineage and transmission in Tibetan Buddhism also found expression artistically; see in particular Jackson, "Lineages and Structure in Tibetan Buddhist Painting", 14, 38. For an example, see Opitz in this volume, Illustration 1.

102 For unknown reasons, Jangchub Wangyal compiled his master's life story only in the year 1540 (iron-mouse year), almost half a century after Gongkarwa had passed away; *Gongkarwa Namthar,* 211.

103 The hagiography of bSod nams rnam rgyal states that Gongkarwa invited his teacher for instruction and ordination to estates in the Gongkar territory; see *Jampalingpa Namthar*, fols. 45a-46b. For the years 1466 (fire-dog year) and 1467 (fire-pig year) it is reported that Gongkarwa travelled to (the three main Yar rgyab) estates Dar rgyas gling, rGyal chen

To conclude I will offer a final thought about Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in light of the cross-disciplinary framework of VISCOM. Given the central role of teachers for the spiritual growth of their followers, *gompa*s are above all sites where such masters reside (*gdan sa*), thus providing access to their exclusive knowledge and proficiencies. In the context of the comparative concept "Enclaves of Learning", Tibetan monasteries are sites in which monks or nuns practise, process and pass on this knowledge, within the boundaries of an institutionalized community or enclave (*chos sde*).

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gling and lHun grub gling in order to receive further religious instructions from Byams pa gling pa; see ibid., fols. 49b–50a.

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