


From Sūtra Collections to Kanjurs: Tracing a Network of Buddhist Canonical Literature across the Western and Central Himalayas

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Introduction

n 2015, Helmut Tauscher and Bruno Lainé published an article entitled “The ‘Early Mustang Kanjur’ and its Descendants,” in which they presented some ideas that call for significant changes to common assumptions in the field of Kanjurs Studies. In particular, they discovered a previously unnoticed larger network of Kanjur collections in the Western Himalayas, besides the commonly known mainstream Tshal pa and Them spangs ma lineages. Many details about this network were formulated as tentative ideas and cautious hypotheses that require additional analysis in the light of further textual evidence. The present article is oriented precisely toward this aim,¹ and therefore a summary of the key findings and propositions by Tauscher and Lainé are in place, before moving on to an introduction of newly discovered manuscript material that will enable us to evaluate and modify some of their earlier ideas. Further, a consideration of this material allows for an investigation of the more distant past, thus providing important insights into the formative temporal context of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when new Kanjurs were produced from earlier, independent canonical collections. While many of the following points are obviously also of preliminary nature and require subsequent evaluation, their importance for the field of Kanjur Studies justifies their early dissemination.

The Early Mustang Kanjur and the hypothesis of a “Mustang group” of Kanjurs

In a common perception of Kanjur Studies, the textual traditions of Tibetan canonical literature are essentially bifurcated in the sense that existing Kanjurs are regarded as belonging either to the Tshal pa or

¹ Research for this article was conducted as part of the project “Buddhist Kanjur Collections in Tibet’s Southern and Western Borderlands” (P 30356), under the direction of Helmut Tauscher and funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). I would like to thank Helmut Tauscher and Bruno Lainé for their invaluable help and feedback as well as Dennis Johnson for his thorough copyediting services.

Them spangs ma lines of transmission.² These form the mainstream traditions to which most of the commonly used Kanjurs belong. This also includes a third “mixed” group, such as the Narthang and Lhasa Kanjurs, which have emerged due to a conflation of these two lines. A fourth group, by contrast, is referred to as “local” or “independent” Kanjurs. This term is used, amongst others, by Helmut Eimer³ to designate local Kanjur productions which are independent of larger textual networks, therefore applicable only to a few, exceptional Kanjur collections.⁴

Drawing from an investigation of newly documented manuscript collections at Hemis (*he mi*) and Basgo (*ba mgo*) in Ladakh, and in view of their connection to the Early Mustang Kanjur, of which only a catalogue exists, Tauscher and Lainé were able to postulate a fifth one, the so-called “Mustang group.”⁵ This hypothesis is mainly based on observations of the order and close textual connections of works contained in the respective collections. A closer comparison of the textual order of selected sections, namely the entire Sūtra (*mdo*) section of one of the Hemis Kanjurs and two volumes of the Sūtra section of material from Basgo (*mdo*, vol. Nya and Zha),⁶ with the contents of the Early Mustang Kanjur revealed “commonalities” that “are too significant to be explained by a common source or by mere coincidence.”⁷ Given the assumed time of production of the respective collections – the Early Mustang Kanjur is connected to the activities of Ngor chen Kun dga’ bzang po (1382–1456)⁸ and therefore dated to the middle of the fifteenth century, while both Hemis and Basgo collections date roughly from the seventeenth century – they concluded that the investigated Hemis and Basgo manuscripts must be part of a larger group of Kanjurs, which “descended from the Early Mustang Kanjur and was disseminated – to what extent ever – in the border regions of southwestern Tibet.”⁹ They further assumed that a Kanjur had existed in the area of Mustang prior to the Early Mustang Kanjur, and that this hypothetical “Old Mustang Kanjur” would hence be more ancient than the Them spangs ma Kanjur, with the term “Kanjur” being used here in a rather loose sense as referring to any collection of the word of the

² See Tauscher and Lainé (2015).

³ Eimer (2012, XXI–XXIII) as well as Tauscher and Lainé (2015, 463–64) discuss the main features of local Kanjurs.

⁴ The basic divisions and affiliations in Kanjur literature are set out in Tauscher (2015) and were well understood already by Eimer (1992, in particular pp. XVIII–XIX) or Harrison (1994).

⁵ See also Tauscher (2015, 109).

⁶ These two volumes were selected as the most striking examples, but significant parallels were detected also in other volumes.

⁷ Tauscher and Lainé (2015, 465).

⁸ On his life and works, see Heimbrel (2017).

⁹ Tauscher and Lainé (2015, 465).

Buddha.¹⁰

Based on these first important findings, Helmut Tauscher initiated a new research project with the aim of gathering and investigating new manuscript material in the Mustang and Dolpo regions and expanding our understanding of the contents and outlines of the “Mustang group.” As will be described below, a consideration of this material confirms the strong textual connections between canonical collections in Ladakh, Dolpo, and Mustang, even though it does not clarify the exact relationship between the Early Mustang Kanjur and the Kanjurs at Hemis and Basgo. It will, however, add crucial information on the processes prior to the creation of the Early Mustang Kanjur, and thus on a period when Tibetan Kanjurs, in the sense of the model ascribed to Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364), were taking shape.

The manuscript collections of Namgyal Monastery, Upper Mustang

From 2010 onward, Christian Luczanits, an art historian and Tibetologist at SOAS, started documenting various monastic collections in the area of Mustang. This work also led him to Namgyal Monastery (*nam rgyal dgon pa*), located on a hill west of the old capital of Lo Manthang. This Sa skya institution hosts a significant collection not only of Buddhist statues but also of older Tibetan manuscripts. Among the books of the monastery, there are forty-three volumes which are markedly different in style and definitely older than the rest of the manuscripts. The entirety of these manuscripts was digitised in a series of research trips, the final one conducted in the summer of 2017 with contribution by the current author.¹¹

An analysis of the textual contents of these volumes demonstrated that these actually consist of two sets: one set of fourteen volumes designated by the volume label (*gdong dar*) “bum,” that is, the Tibetan word for the numeral ‘100.000.’ Accordingly, they contain the *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (ŚSPP), i.e., the “Sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom in 100.000 Ślokas.” The remaining twenty-nine volumes belong to a second set, labelled “mdo sde” or “Sūtra collection.” Interestingly, the current inhabitants of Namgyal Monastery commonly refer to this as “old Kanjur.” This collection is divided in thirty volumes,

¹⁰ Tauscher and Lainé (2015, 466).

¹¹ For a first summary of the monastic objects at Namgyal and their documentation, see Luczanits (2016a) and Luczanits (2016b). A forthcoming book by Christian Luczanits and Markus Viehbeck will offer a detailed art and text historical study of the oldest manuscripts at Namgyal. I would like to thank Christian Luczanits for including me on the respective expedition to Mustang and Mkhan po Tshedbang rig ’dzin, the current abbot of Namgyal Monastery, for hosting us during that trip and for making this research possible.

with each individual volume marked by a basic letter of the Tibetan alphabet. Two volumes (Ma and Ha) are missing, and one volume (Nya) is reduplicated with almost identical contents.

The Sūtra collection and the Prajñāpāramitā set have considerable similarity in style. They use a similar, if not identical, paper of high quality, their page layout and calligraphy are executed with great care, and both contain exceptional illuminations on the first and last folio of every single volume. Art historical considerations and an investigation of the combined codicological, orthographic, and palaeographic features tentatively point to the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century as a likely time of production, with the Prajñāpāramitā set being placed slightly earlier than the Sūtra collection.¹² While similar features may also be found in other sets of Prajñāpāramitā literature,¹³ of which in fact a great number was produced, illuminated sets of this quality are extremely rare. A larger set of canonical literature as gathered in this Sūtra collection, with an early age as assumed for the Namgyal manuscripts, and, moreover, with illuminations of a comprehensive iconographic programme, is not merely a rarity, but must be seen as a unique case in the history and documentation of older Tibetan manuscripts known so far.



Sample of first and last folio of Namgyal, mdo, vol. Na; image courtesy of Christian Luczanits.

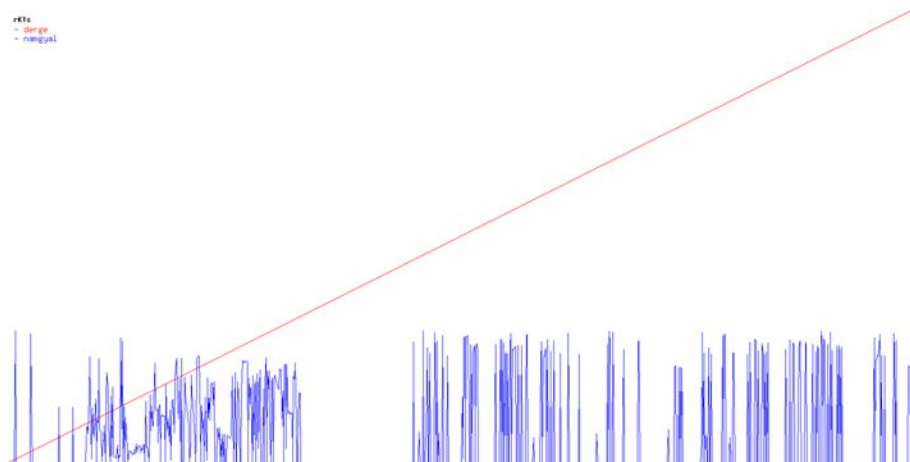
¹² Given the limitations of this article, these considerations cannot be discussed here. See, however, Luczanits and Viehbeck, forthcoming, Chapter One and Chapter Two.

¹³ For example, see the volumes and illuminations studied in Heller (2009) as well as in Allinger and Kalantari (2012).

The dating is of particular importance, since this would mean that the Namgyal manuscripts predate any collection of the mainstream traditions, given that the Tshal pa and Them spangs ma lines go back respectively to the middle of the fourteenth century and the 1430s and that the Kanjurs of these lines that are accessible as physical manuscripts do not predate the seventeenth century.¹⁴ Further, contents and structural order differ considerably from what is known from mainstream Kanjurs and hence raise the question of their mutual relationship.

Contents and connections: comparing the Namgyal Sūtra manuscripts with other collections

In order to address these matters, first a digital catalogue of the volumes was produced to enable a comparison with the contents of other collections. This method was initially developed by Bruno Lainé to compare the placement and order of texts in different collections.¹⁵ The relative placement of texts in the Derge and Namgyal Kanjur is indicated by the graph below.



Comparison of Derge Kanjur (red) and Namgyal (blue).

In this visual rendering, the red line demonstrates the order of texts in Derge, while the blue graph refers to Namgyal for comparison. The

¹⁴ See Tauscher (2015, 108).

¹⁵ For a detailed description of this method and its discussion as a tool for understanding relationships between individual Kanjurs and canonical collections, see Lainé (2009). This tool is presently available online on the rKTs website: <https://www.istb.univie.ac.at/kanjur/rktsneu/structure/index2.php>; accessed Mar. 01, 2019.

complete Namgyal collection (325 texts) contains only a fragment of the texts found in Derge (1107 texts). For example, no Vinaya texts are found in Namgyal. The subsequent Prajñāpāramitā section only contains two shorter texts (rKTs 27 & 28, Ng 28.57, Ng 18.1),¹⁶ next to the large ŚSPP as a separate collection. The Avatamsaka is fully absent in Namgyal, and it contains only two texts among the Ratnakūṭa collection (rKTs 62, Ng 14.12, and rKTs 79, Ng 14.11). In contrast and as expected, many texts from the Sūtra section of Derge are also found in the Namgyal collection. Interestingly, within the Tantra section several tantric texts, mostly in the form of *dhāraṇīs*, are included in Namgyal, but there are also major gaps. In particular, not a single text from the first ten volumes of the Derge Tantra section is found in Namgyal. The Namgyal collection also does not contain any text referred to as tantra (*rgyud*). Further, none of the Old Tantra (*rnying rgyud*) texts are contained in Namgyal. However, several texts from the Dhāraṇi section (*gzungs 'dus*) are found in both Derge and Namgyal.¹⁷

On the other hand, the Namgyal collection contains five works found neither in Derge nor in any other of the mainstream Kanjur traditions:

- *'Phags pa byams pa la bstod pa*; no title in Tibetan or Sanskrit at the beginning of the text, the title is taken from the colophon, Ng8.3, mdo vol. Nya, ff. 54a1-74a5 (also in the duplicate vol. Nya, ff. 94a2-114b4, Ng45.04); rKTs 1290
- *Khams gsum gy-is*¹⁸ *bstod pa zhes bya ba*; no title in Sanskrit, Ng8.4, mdo vol. Nya, ff. 74a7-77b4 (also in the duplicate vol. Nya, ff. 114b4-118a1, Ng45.05); rKTs 1291
- *'Phags pa sdug bsngal brgyad sbyong ba zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo'*; no title in Tibetan or Sanskrit at the beginning of the text, the title is taken from the colophon, Ng22.15, mdo vol. Za, ff. 58a8-59a4; rKTs 1387
- *Klu'i rgyal po sog ma myed kyi gzungs*; no title in Tibetan or Sanskrit at the beginning of the text, the title is taken from the colophon Ng28.45, mdo, vol. Sa, ff. 124a4-129a8; rKTs 1388
- *De bzhin gshegs pa'-i zhal chems nga rgyal bcom pa'i gzungs*; no

¹⁶ Since the titles and other details of the respective texts are not important to the present discussion, the rKTs numbers will act as a universal identifier here. This allows for the clear identification of any known canonical text and thus reference to the respective bibliographical details of its versions in different Kanjur editions as provided in the rKTs database.

¹⁷ A useful overview of the contents of the Derge Kanjur is found in Schaeffer (2009, 156); a detailed handlist of the contents can be retrieved from the rKTs website: <https://www.istb.univie.ac.at/kanjur/rktsneu/handlist/index.php>; accessed Dec. 13, 2018.

¹⁸ Here, the reversed i-vowel sign (*gi gu log*) is rendered as –i.

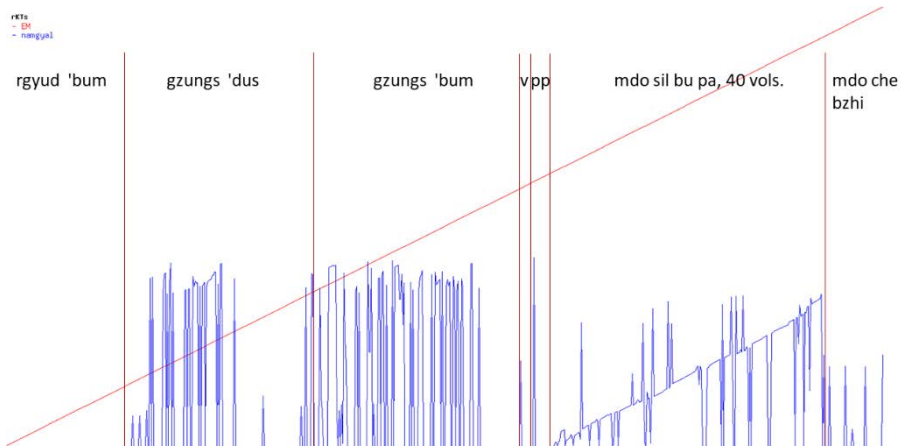
title in Sanskrit, Ng28.46, mdo, vol. Sa, ff. 129a8-133b6; rKTs 1389

The Namgyal collection further contains two texts ascribed to human authors, which therefore would usually be found in the Tanjur:

- *Jātakamālā*, *Skyes pa'i rabs kyi rgyud*; Ng 25.1, rKTs 981
- *Saptakumārikāvadāna*, *Gzhon nu ma bdun gyi rtogs pa brjod pa*; Ng13.16, rKTs 1294

From the perspective of mainstream Kanjurs, all of these works are unusual for a Sūtra collection. At the same time, however, they are also found in other collections, thereby pointing to a larger network that the Namgyal collection belongs to, that is, to various other canonical collections between Ladakh, Mustang, and Dolpo.¹⁹ These close relationships can also be traced by comparing the order of works in the different collections.

As demonstrated in the previous graph, the Namgyal collection bears parallels in textual order neither in relation to the Derge Kanjur nor to any other mainstream Kanjur tradition. However, this situation is different when Namgyal is compared against the Early Mustang catalogue:



Comparison of Early Mustang (red) and Namgyal (blue), with structure of Early Mustang added.

¹⁹ For the details on locating these works in other collections, see Luczanits and Viehbeck, forthcoming, Chapter Three.

The right side of this graph obviously displays a significant ratio of parallel placement. Through the addition of another layer in the form of the content structure of the Early Mustang catalogue, it becomes evident that this pertains only to the section of “Various sūtras” (*mdo sil bu pa*). While texts from the two Dhāraṇi sections (*gzungs 'dus* and *gzungs 'bum*) are also found in Namgyal, they are featured in completely different order. In the Sūtra sections of both Namgyal and Early Mustang, the texts are arranged in a strikingly parallel manner, although the individual volumes contain a varying number of texts, since Early Mustang contains a greater number of volumes than Namgyal. How may this parallel be explained in historical terms?

A possible explanation may be arrived at through a close reading of some of the remarks on the activities on Ngor chen's activities in Mustang, who is said to have initiated and supervised several projects of producing deluxe editions of canonical collections in the mid-fifteenth century.²⁰ His biographer, Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, states the following about the context for the production of the first Kanjur upon Ngor chen's initial arrival to Mustang:²¹

At first, there was no complete *bKa' 'gyur* available in that land. [Ngor chen] then entirely commissioned [one set, taking] the Tantra section from Sa skya and searching in all directions for original [manuscripts] of the other [sections]. For an extensive [presentation], [one] should take a look at the *bKa' 'gyur* catalogue written by the Lord.

In fact, a similar phrasing is found also in the introduction to this very catalogue, that is, the catalogue of the Early Mustang Kanjur:²²

The patron known as dPon po A ma dpal bzang po rgyal mtshan [thought] “[I] should spread the Conqueror's teachings in every way.” In the region of mNga' ris, beginning with the Later

²⁰ A concise summary of the historically likely scenario is given in Heimbel (2017, 314–26). He assumes that Ngor chen was involved in the production of altogether three sets of Kanjurs and one Tanjur.

²¹ Translation in Heimbel (2017, 284–285), who provides the following Tibetan text (appendix, p. 551): *dang po yul der bka' 'gyur tshang ma mi bzhuḡs pa la | rgyud 'bum sa skya nas | gzhan rnam phyogs mtha' dag nas ma phyi btsal nas tshang bar bzheḡs | rgyas par rjes mdzad pa'i bka' 'gyur dkar chag tu blta |*.

²² Translation taken from Heimbel (2017, 319–20), with the following text in Tibetan: *dpon po a ma dpal bzang po rgyal mtshan zhes rnam par grags pa'i sbyin bdag (...) des | rgyal ba'i bstan pa sgo thams cad nas rgyas par bya ba dang | khyad par mnga' ris kyi sa phyogs su bstan pa phyi dar gyi dus nas brtsams te yun ring mo'i bar la bstan pa rin po che rma med par gnas su zin kyang | dus ha cang ring du gyur pa'i dbang gis glegs bam 'ga zhig 'thor nas deng sang rgyal ba'i bka' 'gyur ro cog gi glegs bam tshang ba phyogs gcig mi bzhuḡs pa'i mun pas khyab pa'i skabs 'dir | bka' 'gyur ro cog gi nyi ma 'od zer | mnga' ris kyi sa'i cha thams cad du shar bar bya'o snyam pa'i dgongs pa zab mo thugs la shar ba ltar phyag len du btab nas bris pa'i chos kyi rnam grangs la |*.

Spread of the [Buddha's] doctrine, the precious teachings had already persisted without blemish for a long time. But since a very long time had lapsed, some volumes had become scattered and thus these days the entire volumes of the *Complete Translation of the Word of the Buddha* [i.e., the *bKa' 'gyur*] are not available in one place. At the point, when [mNga' ris] was pervaded by [such kind of] darkness, [A ma dpal] developed in particular the profound thought: "The sun rays of an entire *bKa' 'gyur* shall arise in every place of mNga' ris," and accordingly implemented [its production]. (...)

Based mainly on this second passage, Tauscher and Lainé assumed that a Kanjur had existed in Mustang before the creation of the Early Mustang Kanjur, that is, the "Old Mustang Kanjur" on which the earlier one was based.²³ The previous quotation, in contrast, and, more importantly, the information that can be drawn from a sequential comparison of Early Mustang and Namgyal suggest another explanation: namely that canonical manuscripts were indeed available in Mustang when Ngor chen entered the area in the fifteenth century, but that these collections were not seen to represent a complete Kanjur (according to Central Tibetan standards?). For this reason, new Kanjur sets were created in a patchwork-like fashion, combining manuscript collections that were available in Mustang, such as the Sūtra collections, while other parts, such as the mentioned Tantra section from Sa skya, had to be gathered from other places. While another scenario would also be possible, the comparison of the textual contents of the Early Mustang and the Namgyal collections strongly suggests that the Sūtra section of Early Mustang has a close historical relationship to Namgyal or similar collections.²⁴ The boundaries of individual volumes shifted and individual works were added or omitted, but the overall parallel arrangement of texts remains striking. Remarkably, this is true exclusively for the Sūtra section. In this case, Namgyal or similar collections served as a model for Early Mustang, while other sections were rather based on other collections. The comparison also demonstrates that a large number of texts, mostly shorter *dhāraṇīs* found in the last three volumes of Namgyal, were not included in Early Mustang. While most of these texts are also found in Early Mustang, they are placed in different sections (*gzungs 'dus* and *gzungs 'bum*) and their order does not suggest any historical relationship. This could imply that the presence

²³ See Tauscher and Lainé (2015, 465–66). As noted by Heimbel (2017, 319), this passage in Ngor chen's catalogue has been interpreted in different ways; see, for example, Eimer (1999, 11–12).

²⁴ In fact, more collections with a similar structure exist in this area, see the discussion of the Lang collections below.

of tantric texts in a collection identified as Sūtra was seen as problematic and hence corrected when new, more standardized Kanjurs were produced under Central Tibetan influence in the fifteenth century. What then does the Namgyal Sūtra collection represent, if it is not a “standard” Kanjur? Fortunately, similar textual collections have survived also at other places and provide information about this period of early canonical production.

The “Dolpo Kanjur” and the Lang collections

The “Dolpo Kanjur” consists of volumes of canonical texts preserved at Nesar Monastery (*gnas gsar dgon pa*), located at Bicher village in Upper Dolpo. This monastery houses a rich treasure of ancient manuscripts, consisting of 642 volumes with a total of about 160.000 folios, roughly 150 of them illuminated. An initial cursory handlist of these volumes was produced by Amy Heller.²⁵ As outlined by Heller, the volumes stem from three different monastic collections. Most of the volumes originally belonged to Nesar, but one collection of ninety-eight volumes was relocated from nearby Lang Monastery (*glang dgon pa*) and another collection of seventy-one volumes from nearby Serkhang Temple (*gser khang*). The close ties between these monasteries were investigated by Klaus-Dieter Mathes.²⁶ In 2014, the head lama of Nesar Monastery, Bla ma Bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan, kindly prepared photographs of a complete Kanjur set from Nesar for the Resources for Kanjur and Tanjur Studies (rKTs) archive. These eighty-eight volumes have since been referred to as “Dolpo Kanjur.” During recent field work in August 2018,²⁷ it was understood that these eighty-eight volumes were effectively compiled from the three collections of Nesar, Lang, and Serkhang. In this sense, they represent an artificial collection, although close historical connections between textual sources from these monasteries must be assumed. Yet, some of these volumes exhibit a structure similar to that of Namgyal. Since many of these have come from the collection of Lang Monastery, this collection of altogether ninety-eight volumes was systematically and exhaustively digitised in 2018.

In this case, too, it was first assumed that the collection could represent a Kanjur, considering that the size of ninety-eight volumes represents a fitting number in Kanjur terms. However, a Kanjur did in fact not emerge. Rather, the Lang manuscripts exhibit a clear focus on

²⁵ See Heller (2007) and Heller (2009).

²⁶ See Mathes (2003).

²⁷ I would like to thank the head lama of Nesar Monastery, Bla ma Bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan, for his hospitality during that trip and for facilitating this research. Thanks also go to 'Jigs med blo gros for his invaluable assistance and to Klaus-Dieter Mathes for establishing the contact to Nesar in the first place.

Prajñāpāramitā and Sūtra collections. The collection contains a total amount of twenty-three volumes of the *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (ŚSP). The situation remains complicated, as many of the volumes are fragmented or seem amalgamated, but a first estimation gives the impression that these volumes stem from at least three different sets of the ŚSP, produced tentatively between the late thirteenth to sixteenth centuries.²⁸ On the other side, there is a total of sixty-one volumes that belong to Sūtra collections. A first analysis of these suggests that they form three different sets, all of which are similar to the Namgyal collection in the sense that each of them is divided into thirty volumes, indicated by the thirty basic letters of the Tibetan alphabet. The oldest of these sets, with palaeographical features which suggest an age similar to that of the Namgyal collection, is preserved only in fragments of six extant volumes. Moreover, twenty-five volumes seem to be part of a rather incoherent set, in the sense that individual volumes were produced at different stages and over a larger period of time, perhaps from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. Some of these volumes contain dedicatory prefaces that elucidate the context of their production.²⁹ Furthermore, there is one complete set of thirty volumes, which can be tentatively dated to the interim period of the late fourteenth to fifteenth centuries.³⁰ Apart from these, there are fifteen additional volumes³¹ of both canonical and non-canonical texts, mostly represented by individual Prajñāpāramitāsūtras, that do not point to the usual components of a Kanjur.

A first catalogue of the volumes from Lang was produced for the one complete Sūtra set. Many volumes of this set contain a cover page indicating that they belong to the set referred to as “Extensive Sūtra collection” (*mdo sde rgyas pa*). For some of the volumes, however, the cover is lacking, and thus their affiliation to the set can only be concluded based on stylistic considerations and content analysis. Their contents in turn reveal a close connection to the Sūtra set from Namgyal. All those texts in the Namgyal collection that are deemed as unusual, since they were either absent in mainstream Kanjurs or placed in Tanjurs, are also present in the Lang collection. Furthermore,

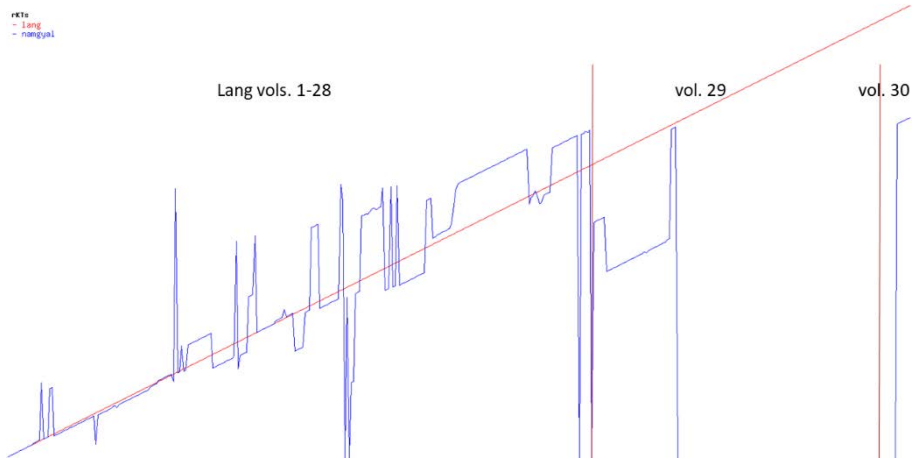
²⁸ A detailed analysis of the entire corpus is a desideratum and thus intended as a future research project. This will be concerned with a content analysis as well as codicological study of the volumes, including their dating. That said, some details on the dating of individual volumes were already given in Heller (2009) and Heller (2007).

²⁹ Some of these prefaces are examined in Heller (2009) and Heller (2007).

³⁰ Distinguishing these three sets is complicated by the fact that individual leaves were exchanged and mixed up among the different volumes.

³¹ Thus, the sum total amounts to ninety-nine volumes (instead of ninety-eight), since one bundle, referred to as L89 in Heller (2009, 226), contains fragments of two different volumes.

the Lang collection contains several additional texts not found in mainstream Kanjurs.³² Most of these are short *dhāraṇīs* included in volume Ha, that is, one of the two volumes missing from the Namgyal collection. The close relationship between these two collections is also evident in a comparison of their order of texts:

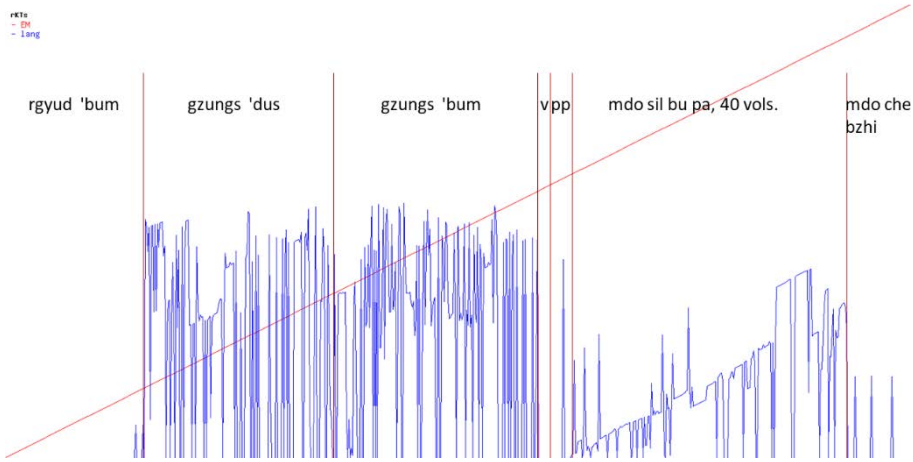


Comparison of Lang (red) and Namgyal (blue), with the structure of Lang added.

As illustrated by the graph above, there are significant similarities concerning the order of texts, but there is no consistent parallel sequence. While smaller groups of texts are arranged in similar order, they may be located in a different volume in the other collection. Most striking is perhaps the larger gap in volume Ha (29), but here it must be considered that this entire volume is missing from Namgyal. That said, the first thirty-seven texts of volume Ha from Lang are also found in Namgyal, where they are arranged in similar order in volume Za (22). Volume Ha is extraordinarily extensive in the sense that it contains altogether 140 texts, often extremely short and obscure *dhāraṇīs*. This also explains the difference in total count, with Lang containing overall 433 and Namgyal containing 325 texts.

The prominent presence of *dhāraṇīs* also becomes obvious through a comparison between the Early Mustang catalogue and the Lang collection:

³² A first handlist of this collection is provided in the rKTs archive: <https://www.istb.univie.ac.at/kanjur/rktsneu/handlist/index.php>; accessed March 05, 2019. At the time of writing, twenty-one texts remain to be identified.



Comparison of Early Mustang (red) and Lang (blue), with the structure of Early Mustang added.

As already observed in the above comparison between Namgyal and Early Mustang, close connections are only evident for texts included in the Sūtra section of Early Mustang. While many *dhāraṇī* texts are found in both collections, they are arranged in a different order. This too suggests that canonical collections, like the “Sūtra collection” of Namgyal or the “Extended Sūtra collection” of Lang, have served as sources for the inclusion of texts into Sūtra sections when new Kanjurs were produced in Mustang in the fifteenth century,³³ while at the same time the overall conceptual structure of these Kanjurs relied on different models, most likely derived from Central Tibet. The Sūtra collections, in contrast, seem to reflect an earlier stage of development prior to the emergence of fully-structured Kanjurs.

From Sūtra collections to Kanjurs

In this light, it seems feasible to reflect on the conceptual nature of the Sūtra collections found in Namgyal and Lang. First of all, it is important to note that their structure is not to be regarded as unique and exceptional, but rather that they are representations of a larger pattern. In the Lang collection alone, we find three similarly structured sets of Sūtra collections. Furthermore, it may be expected that traces of similar

³³ It is likely that the structure of the Early Mustang catalogue corresponds with Kanjurs that still exist in Mustang, such as the famous “Golden Kanjurs” at Tsarang and Lo Manthang; see Mathes (1997, 127). These, however, are yet to be investigated.

sets will also be found in the Nesar and Serkhang collections housed in the same temple in Bicher. Moreover, a first preliminary investigation of a private textual collection in Saldang and of the canonical collections at Shey Monastery (*shel dgon pa*) has already confirmed the existence of similar thirty-volume Sūtra sets also at other locations in Upper Dolpo. However, the current state of research does not predicate whether these are confined, in this very structure, to the area of Dolpo and Mustang. At all these places, the Sūtra sets, often along with other older manuscripts, sets of the ŚSPP, Dhāraṇi collections, and other individual sūtras, are commonly referred to as “old Kanjurs.” Yet, when prompted about their details, religious experts are able to differentiate between different sets of texts as well as between later “standard” Kanjurs and the Sūtra collections. The actual usage of these texts at any given monastery is that all of the volumes form a larger conceptual unit, which is commonly placed at the head of the main temple, representing the idealised entirety of the Buddhist teaching in the form of a symbolic material object. They may be also used in ritual contexts, in which they are recited or paraded through a village for purification of the community, its crops and livestock, as well as for protection from natural disasters.³⁴ In these ritual and symbolic contexts, the actual contents of a particular collection are not essential. Rather, volumes of this kind form a “practical canon,” that is, they represent an idealised “notional canon” of the entirety of all Buddhist works, of which they are seen as a local instantiation.³⁵ While it is certainly appropriate to speak of a “canon” or “canonical collections” in this sense, the use of these terms should not blind against the fundamentally open nature of such collections and their content-related diversity.³⁶

A historical perspective currently offers only limited information on how these Sūtra collections were regarded in earlier times. It seems that the idea of the term “Kanjur” as referring to a structured canon in the sense of Bu ston’s fourteenth century model only solidified with that very model. In the previous centuries, the term was obviously

³⁴ On such ritual usages in Tibetan village communities, see Gutschow and Gutschow (2003) and Childs (2005). Such usage for recitation is also attested by marginal notes in the Namgyal manuscripts, see, for example, Namgyal, mdo, vol. A, f.287b, line 9ff.: *chos med kyi sprang po klu sgrubs rgya mtsho zhes bya bas mdo sde glegs bam nyi shu rtsa byad rang gi lce thog nas gtsang mdon tshad mar byas pas dge ba'i rtsa bas pha mas gtso byas sems can thams cad kyi tshe 'dir 'gal rkyen bar chad zhi nas phyi ma bde ba can du skye bar 'gyur cig* l. These notes and their indications for the social usage of such manuscripts will be discussed in a forthcoming article, tentatively titled “Of Men and Manuscripts.”

³⁵ See Silk (2015), for different notions of canonicity in a Buddhist context, as well as Stanley (2014, 385), for the notion of a “practical canon.”

³⁶ Caution is certainly required when using the term “canon” in a Tibetan Buddhist context, as previously argued by Skilling (1997, 101–2); yet it largely depends on the notions associated with the term.

used more loosely to designate larger collections of Buddhist texts.³⁷ As suggested by Peter Skilling,³⁸ it is likely that the individual components that were combined to form a structured Kanjur were first transmitted independently. Of special importance for our context is the idea that texts were gathered in anthologies called “*mdo mang(s)*,” literally “Many sūtras.” These were obviously also taken as sources for the Sūtra sections of later Kanjurs, as attested, for example, in the colophons of the Tshal pa Kanjur documented in the Lithang Kanjur.³⁹ These colophons are of particular interest, since they record two processes in the transition from Sūtra collections to Kanjurs also observed in the above comparison of the Namgyal or Lang collections and the Early Mustang Kanjur: namely that tantric texts were extracted from the Sūtra collections and placed into the respective tantric sections (*rgyud 'bum*), and that texts composed by human authors were extracted and placed into the Tanjur (*bstan bcos 'gyur ro cog*). With regard to the latter, two of the respective works found in Namgyal and Lang, the *Jātakamālā* and the *Saptakumārikāvadāna*,⁴⁰ are mentioned among the examples listed in the Lithang Kanjur:⁴¹

Dhāraṇīs that are not real sūtras but belong to the tantric section were inscribed into the collection of tantras (*rgyud 'bum*) [...]. [Works] like the *Jātakamālā*, the *Varṇārhavarṇebhagavatobuddhasyastotreśakyastavaonāma*, or the *Saptakumārikāvadāna* were composed later by scholars of the *śāstras*, such as Ācārya Śūra and others, and hence [...] were inscribed into the Tanjur (*bstan bcos 'gyur ro cog*) [...].

While this aspect certainly warrants closer investigation, it also corroborates the idea that the Namgyal and Lang collections are representatives of a strand of smaller independent collections that existed prior

³⁷ See Schaeffer and Kuijp (2009, 9–14). For one of such collections found at Gondhla, Helmut Tauscher introduced the term “proto-Kanjur” to distinguish it against later fully-structured Kanjurs, see Tauscher (2008), in particular pp. XI–XII.

³⁸ See Skilling (1997), especially pp. 97–98, further also Eimer (2002, 4).

³⁹ A transliteration of the Tibetan text and partial English translation of the respective section colophons of the Lithang Kanjur is provided in Shastri (1987).

⁴⁰ Interestingly, the *Saptakumārikāvadāna*, is also included in the catalogue of the Early Mustang Kanjur (EM 636), see Eimer (1999, 110).

⁴¹ Lithang, *mdo sde*, vol. AH, pp. 295b7–296a4: *mdo dngos ma yin pa rgyud sder gtogs pa'i gzungs rnams ni rgyud 'bum gyi nang du bris shing* | [...] *skyes rabs dang sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das la bstod pa bsngags par 'os pa bsngags pa la sogs pa'i bstod pa rnams dang* / *gzhon nu ma bdun gyi rtogs pa brjod pa la sogs pa rnams ni phyis slob dpon dpa' bo la sogs pa bstan bcos mkhan po rnams kyis mdzad pa yin pa'i phyir* [...] *bstan bcos 'gyur ro cog gi nang du bris pas* [...] (TBRC Resource ID W4CZ7445). Here, neither the Tibetan text nor the English rendering given in Shastri (1987) were found to be reliable. On these colophons and the creation of the Old Snar thang Kanjur, see also Harrison (1994, 297–98) and Harrison (1996, 77–78).

to fully-developed Kanjurs. It remains possible that what is referred to here as Sūtra collections represents only one section and thus a fragment of Kanjur-like collections which at one time were more extensive, but the presence of these Sūtra collections without traces of other typical Kanjur-elements, their timing, and the observation of the editorial processes just described suggests otherwise. It rather seems that these Sūtra collections provide, for the first time, a material basis for the investigation of the production processes of Kanjurs from earlier collections.⁴²

Conclusions: contours and prospects of the “Mustang group”

With the strong connections already observed between the Basgo and Hemis collections, the Early Mustang Kanjur, and now, as a new addition, the Sūtra collections of Namgyal and Lang – together with the likely additional textual collections in Upper Dolpo – we now have a clear proof of a network of Tibetan canonical literature that stretches out between Ladakh, Dolpo, and Mustang. Given the geographic scope of this network and the increasing number of collections that are detected as its members, it seems misleading to conceive of its representatives as a “local” or “independent” transmission of Buddhist literature. Rather, it must be regarded as another important line of transmission next to the mainstream lineages of Tshal pa and Them spangs ma. For now, it seems that the focus of this network lies in the Western and Central Himalayas, but only a future investigation of other members of this network will allow for a clearer determination of its geographical boundaries and hence provide conditions for evaluating the viability of its provisional label as “Mustang group.”

The main argument for this network has been the detection of significant parallels in the arrangement of texts in different collections. While this article, too, is mainly focused on observations based on this approach, it should be noted that equally close connections are also found on the textual level.⁴³ Working more closely on a detailed philological analysis of the wording of individual texts and a comparison of these with the textual variations in other collections could be a viable

⁴² Of course one also has to consider other important manuscript collections such as those in Tabo, see Steinkellner (1994), and Gondhla, see Tauscher (2008), but as these are fragmentary and not structured systematically in one coherent collection their order cannot easily be mapped onto other collections.

⁴³ Some of these will be discussed in Tauscher, forthcoming (“Chinese Whispers? Transmitting, Transferring and Translating Buddhist Literature” in a volume edited by Vincent Eltschinger *et al.*), further a forthcoming edition of the *Lañkāvatārasūtra* by Lambert Schmithausen, and also in our own study, Luczanits and Viehbeck, forthcoming, Chapter Three.

solution to approach some of the open questions regarding that network. While a rough historical dating of the individual collections allows for the formulation of a relative chronology, so far we lack a clear understanding of the detailed relations between these collections and the historical possibilities underlying their connections. Such an approach may also provide insights into the relationships of the texts of this network to the texts of the mainstream Kanjurs, and thus help to clarify whether Sūtra collections like the ones found at Namgyal or Lang must be regarded as representing a strand of textual transmission that predates what is formulated in later structured Kanjurs, as it seems likely in light of their historical placement. Such an assumption is also encouraged by a recent philological study of the *Mañjuśrīvihārasūtra* conducted by James Apple. By means of a text-critical comparison of five versions of the text from Dunhuang and altogether seventeen versions from different Kanjur editions, including material from Basgo and Hemis, Apple came to the conclusion that the latter must be regarded as forming a separate Western Tibetan group that contains readings older than all witnesses of the mainstream Kanjurs of the Tshal pa and Them spangs ma lines.⁴⁴ It remains to be investigated whether this can be claimed also for other texts and for the newly added members of this group.

In any case, the manuscript collections at Namgyal and Lang provide unexpectedly rich material for textual-historical research, since an investigation of their contents and a comparison with later, fully-structured Kanjurs could elucidate not only the processes of selection, restructuring, and refinement on the content level of newly created collections, but also on the more granular level of the actual wording of the individual works they contain.

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⁴⁴ See Apple (2014, in particular pp. 293–300).

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