

Transmission of Tantra Texts in the “Mustang Group” of Kanjurs

The *Abhidhānottaratantra*

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1 General Remarks

Within the commonly accepted classification of Tibetan Kanjurs, the pre-eighteenth-century collections from the southern and western borderlands of the Tibetan cultural sphere cannot be assigned either to the Tshal pa or the Them spangs ma group, and could, thus, be regarded as “local” or “independent” according to established criteria.¹ A characteristic feature of these collections is that they adopt the overall structural concept of Tshal pa and Them spangs ma, but preserve elements of traditions that were not considered in the compilation of the mainstream Kanjurs.

Structural commonalities of the Early Mustang Kanjur and the Kanjurs discovered at Hemis and Basgo in Ladakh, however, provoked the assumption of an additional network of transmission, provisionally labelled “Mustang group”.² Recent documentation work of the Tibetan Manuscript Project Vienna (TMPV) has revealed several other canonical collections in Mustang and Dolpo that are clearly part of this network. As a common feature, these collections consist of a historically older nucleus of sets of the *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* and of a specific model of a Sūtra collection comprising thirty volumes. In all cases, parts of other Kanjur sections were added to the collections at later stages, drawn from yet unidentified sources. The textual sequence in these Sūtra collections, which contain also a considerable number of *dhāraṇī*, not only clearly indicates their tight mutual connections, but also shows their close relationships to other members of the Mustang group, as reflected in the Sūtra section of the Early Mustang Kanjur and in the Kanjurs of Hemis and Basgo.³

¹ For a definition of these terms, see Eimer 2012, xxi and Tauscher and Lainé 2015, 463f.

² See Tauscher and Lainé 2015.

³ See Viehbeck 2020.

Evidence that attests a distinct line of textual transmission within these “Western Tibetan” collections has emerged in various contexts,⁴ and the label “Mustang group” has started to be accepted by the academic community. Nevertheless, some details still remain vague or even speculative, although the basic principles seem to be beyond question. Some of the potential candidates are incomplete, fragmentary, or even fictive collections, so that not even their assignment to the “Mustang group” is unequivocal.

Regardless of this restriction, the following collections from Mustang, Dolpo, and Ladakh can be considered at the present stage of research:

1.1 Mustang

- Namgyal (*rnam rgyal*), fourteenth century?⁵

The oldest strata of the manuscripts consist only of the nucleus as described above, i.e., the Sūtra collection of thirty volumes plus the *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*.

- Early Mustang Kanjur (EM), mid-fifteenth century

This term refers to a notional canonical collection reportedly compiled by Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456) at the request of King A ma dpal bzang po rgyal mtshan (ca. 1380–1440) in the course of his three journeys to Mustang, hypothetically taken as corresponding to *The Early Mustang Kanjur Catalogue* as it is published in Eimer 1999. However, Ngor chen was involved in commissioning more than only one set of Kanjurs in Mustang, and Eimer's edition is, in fact, the compilation of two catalogues, the *Mdo sngags bka' 'gyur dkar chag* and Ngor chen's *Bka' 'gyur ro cog gi dkar chag bstan pa gsal ba'i sgron me*. Possibly, these two do not actually delineate the same collection.⁶ None of these Kanjurs is extant, but it is probably safe to assume that they were not essentially different, although we do not possess any information to this effect. It cannot be expected that the textual material was compiled and arranged anew for each of them. Without attempting to go into any detail of this matter, in the present context the “Early Mustang Kanjur” is treated as one unit and taken to represent the fifteenth-century Mustang Kanjurs in content and structure.

The section of shorter Sūtra texts (called *mdo sil bu*) shows close connections to the textual sequence of the collection from Rnam rgyal, but

4 E.g., Schmithausen 2020, Teil 2, endnote 170.

5 See Viehbeck 2020 and Luczanits and Viehbeck 2021.

6 On Ngor chen's activities connected with commissioning canonical collections, see Heimbel 2017, 314ff.

it consists of forty volumes. The Tantra section, consisting of twenty-one volumes, contains only *gsar rgyud* texts. In addition, there are three volumes of *gzungs 'dus* and a *gzungs 'bum* of six volumes.

- Tsarang (Ts), seventeenth century?⁷

The Kanjurs kept at the royal palaces of Lo Manthang (*glo smon thang*) and Tsarang (*gtsang rang*) “supposedly go back to”⁸ EM, directly or indirectly, but their actual relation still needs to be clarified.⁹

Unlike EM, the Sūtra section of Ts consists of thirty volumes, just as in the “core collections” of the Mustang group. As this material is not accessible, however, nothing can be said about their actual agreement or disagreement with regard to content and structure.

The Tantra section includes fifteen volumes (Ka–Pha and A, with no volume Ta indicated, but two volumes labelled Tha). The number of volumes might suggest a relation of some sort to Hg (below). Ten of these (Ka–Tha) were photographed in 1996 by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project;¹⁰ the rest of the collection is not accessible.

The Kanjur of Lo Manthang (*glo smon thang*) has never been documented at all.

1.2 Dolpo¹¹

- Nesar (*gnas gsar*)
- Lang (*glang*)
- Serkhang (*gser khang*)

All three collections are presently housed at Nesar Monastery in Bicher village, Upper Dolpo. Neither of the three is a “full Kanjur” with all its sections or any reasonably “complete” section, nor a homogeneous collection in itself. Similar to Namgyal, the older parts of the manuscripts seem to be constituted by Sūtra collections (in thirty volumes) and sets of the *Śatasāhasrikā*. In 2014, Nesar Monastery provided the TMPV with a digital copy of what

⁷ Not later than 1713, according to Mathes 1997, 128.

⁸ Mathes 1997, 127.

⁹ Some evidence might question or even contradict a direct dependence of Ts on EM. On discrepancies in the number of volumes and the arrangement of the sections, see Tauscher and Lainé 2015, 466f. Different versions of the *Hevajratāntra* contained in EM and Ts are mentioned below. On the uncertain relation of the canonical scriptures kept in Mustang, see Heimbrel 2017, 318ff.

¹⁰ See Mathes 1997.

¹¹ On these manuscripts, see Mathes 2003, 94ff., Heller 2007 and 2009 (with a preliminary handlist in Appendix 1), Viehbeck 2020, and Tauscher (forthcoming).

they thought to represent a Dolpo Kanjur, consisting of eighty-eight volumes and compiled from all three collections. This “Dolpo Kanjur” is artificial, but the “pseudo-editorial” enterprise from which it resulted might not be fundamentally different from the compilation of, e.g., the Kanjur of Basgo (below) and probably others as well. Besides, these three collections are not fully catalogued, nor has their formation been sufficiently studied. For these reasons and for the time being, I apply the label “Dolpo” (Do) to the entire material, without distinction among the three collections.

The manuscripts originate from various times, with their oldest layers probably dating back to the fourteenth (or even thirteenth?) century. Radiocarbon analysis of the illuminated manuscripts from the *Sūtra* and *Śatasāhasrikā* sections gives ca. 1350–1500 as the most probable date.¹² Orthographic and paleographic peculiarities, too, point to the fourteenth century for the oldest manuscripts. All three sets have string holes surrounded by red circles, though not on all of their leaves, and show traces of old orthography and paleography.

The Tantra section of Do is made up of nineteen partly incomplete or fragmentary volumes assembled from at least three different sets. One consists of seven volumes of *gsar rgyud* and five volumes of *mying rgyud*; the second one consists of six volumes of *gsar rgyud*. These two sets belong to the Nesar collection. They include uncommon texts, partly shared by Basgo, Hemis, Newark/Bathang, and Orgyan Ling.

- Drakmar (*brag dmar* or *drag dmar*),¹³ fifteenth to sixteenth century? The collection of Drakmar Monastery (Lower Dolpo) was documented by TMPV in 2023. It is not fully analysed yet.

1.3 Ladakh¹⁴

- Basgo (X)

The Kanjur of Basgo (*ba mgo*)¹⁵ was compiled in the late twentieth century from several Kanjur sets dating from the seventeenth century. In addition to this full Kanjur, Basgo houses some 60,000 folios of fragments from five or six different sets, all of more or less the same age. They show traces of previous attempts to compile a full Kanjur. Some 900 folios are considerably older and can tentatively be dated to the fourteenth to fifteenth century.

¹² See Heller 2009, 77.

¹³ See Heller 2009, 204.

¹⁴ On these Ladakhi collections, see Tauscher and Lainé 2015.

¹⁵ Cf. the alternative spelling *bab sgo* in older sources.

Within the compounds of Basgo Fort there are two temples, Byams pa lha khang (fifteenth century) and Gser zangs lha khang (seventeenth century), where the Kanjur is kept.¹⁶ In addition, there is a small chapel, commonly known as Byams chung lha khang (seventeenth century), which was originally constructed as a mosque for Queen Gyal khatun, the Balti wife of King 'Jam dbyangs rnam rgyal (1595–1616). However, Basgo has never been the seat of a monastic community of significance. Under this condition, the amount of canonical material preserved there is amazing. The reasons for this fact can only be speculated on. Possibly, Gser zangs lha khang served as a kind of deposit for damaged or incomplete Kanjurs of the region, e.g., after the Dogra wars of the nineteenth century.

The Sūtra section of this Kanjur largely agrees with the other members of the Mustang group. Its Tantra section consists of twenty partly incomplete volumes of *gsar rgyud*, and it contains some unique or uncommon texts; only very few *rnying rgyud* texts are intermingled. A considerable number of these, however, are extant among the fragments. The whole section is kept in amazing disorder, and the present arrangement¹⁷ of its individual texts does not allow for any conclusion as to a possible model.

- Hemis I (He)
- Hemis II (Hi)

At Hemis (*he mi*) Monastery, a great number of canonical manuscripts were discovered in 2007 in a sealed basement underneath the Tshoms lha khang. The majority of them comprise fragments of two Kanjurs, some 50,000 leaves in total. Both of them can be dated to the early seventeenth century, shortly after the foundation of Hemis Monastery (around 1630).¹⁸

Only little Tantra material is extant among them. The collection of He contains one fragmentary volume of *rnying rgyud*, and the collection of Hi contains eight incomplete volumes of *gsar rgyud* and one volume of *rnying rgyud*.

- Hemis Gold (Hg)

In addition, these findings include some 4,800 folios of more or less the same date as He, Hi, and X,¹⁹ written in golden ink on dark blue or black

16 Initially, the fragments were stored at Gser zangs lha khang, but they were shifted to a newly adapted building within the former palace quarters.

17 Attempts to reconstruct the order possibly intended by the compilers in the 20th century are being made in ongoing research by TMPV.

18 On the dating, see Tauscher and Lainé 2015, 469f. and note 21.

19 Just as in He and X, Nam mkha' dpal mgon is mentioned as a reviser. On this prominent Ladakhi official/scholar of the 17th century and on controversial or even “apologetic” verses he composed, see Tauscher and Lainé 2015, 469f. and note 25.

paper (*mthing shog*). Locally they are considered a “golden Kanjur,” but this classification is justified only if the term “Kanjur” is taken in its original, very broad, and general sense as “the Buddha’s word in translation.” Although cataloguing is not completed and revisions have to be made at several points, it is clear that these manuscripts are the remains of different collections, and only one of those could possibly have been a Kanjur in the narrower and technical sense of the term, referring to a fully edited and structured collection in the succession of the Old Narthang Kanjur.²⁰

With the exception of only a few folios, the ca. 186 texts (including duplications, but not counting single leaves from apparently different sets of manuscripts) represented belong to the Tantra section.²¹ Some of these show volume indications, viz., Ka, Kha, Nga, Ca, Cha, Ta, Da, Pha, and A, which might suggest a Kanjur section initially consisting of fifteen volumes, as attested in Ts (above). Structural agreements of Hg and Ts, however, are restricted to cases of minor significance, as they are shared by mainstream Kanjurs as well.

Two of these volumes seem to be reasonably complete with regard to the texts contained, which does not mean that the individual texts are complete: Hg 05 (Kha fol. 1–403, seven texts), and Hg 63 (Nga fol. 1–349, thirty-six texts), which largely reflect the textual sequence of the mainstream Kanjurs, i.e., D vol. Ga, with some texts from other volumes added as well as unidentified texts.

The majority of texts of Hg, however, do not indicate any volume, and thus it can probably be ruled out that they once were part of a Kanjur; they might be the remains of at least one set of *rgyud ’bum*. Among those, there is only one volume (Hg 56, fol. 2–199, thirty texts) that provides the impression of being complete to some extent; it largely, though not completely, corresponds to volume Nga from above. In general, several texts are contained in both versions with and without volume indication, and, on a smaller scale, structural agreements between them can be observed at several points.

There might have been volumes widely identical with and without volume indication, even to the point of foliation. Alternatively, there should have been at least one volume which is not indicated throughout: The first

20 On these different implications of the term “Kanjur” (*bka’ ’gyur*), see, e.g., Tauscher 2015, 103.

21 Included in Hg are two *sher phyin* texts (Hg 04), one *mdo* (Hg 50–006), and one *gzungs*, which is included in the Sūtra section in the Tshal pa Kanjurs and in both the Sūtra and the Tantra sections in Them spangs ma (Hg 50–008). The respective manuscripts are evidently from different sets.

part of the *Vidyottama-mahātantra* (rKTs 740, D 746), e.g., is contained in a volume Nga, fol. 1–170 (Hg 10-001 + 21-001); its second part, fol. 171–242, with perfectly matching textual continuity, has no volume indication (Hg 21-001). This matter, however, calls for closer investigation.

Despite these open questions, and regardless of the fact that Hg contains practically only Tantra texts and we have no information whatsoever about other sections of a Kanjur of which Hg might have been a part, it is counted among the “Mustang group of Kanjurs.” cursory textual comparison carried out so far shows a close relation to X, and Hg might be considered a representative of a/the Mustang group’s Tantra section, its content, and structure.

Smaller canonical collections from that area, like Gondhla²² and others, can be expected to preserve the same line of textual transmission, but, strictly speaking, they cannot be counted among the “Mustang group.”

Additional representatives of this canonical network can certainly be expected to be extant among the rich manuscript findings in Ngari Prefecture of the PRC,²³ but this question has to be examined in separate research.

The Kanjur of Phugdrag (*phug brag*, F; around 1700) does definitively not belong to the Mustang group, but, apart from its own individual peculiarities, occasionally it shows relations to this group, in particular to Do, and it has to be considered in any text-critical analysis of this material.

In the wider context of studying the genesis and development of these canonical collections, the general issue of this paper is the investigation of their Tantra sections as well as the potential origin and relations of their Tantra texts. It is a report on work in progress at an early stage, and it reflects or even speculates on possibilities rather than giving definite answers based on established facts.

When compiling the Kanjur(s) of Mustang, Ngor chen might have brought the Tantra section from Sakya (*sa skya*) and collected the rest locally, as noted by Sangs rgyas phun tshogs (1649–1705) in his *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar*,²⁴ but possibly he might have also collected texts of all sections, including Tantra,

22 See Tauscher 2008.

23 See, e.g., the recent publications Xiong & Shargan 2021 and 2022, Zhang & Zhang 2023.

24 Heimbel 2017, 284 (translation) and 551 (Tibetan text): “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]” (*dang po yul der bka’ gyur tshang ma mi bzhangs pa la/ rgyud ’bum sa skya nas/ gzhan rnam phyogs mtha’ dag nas ma phyi btsal nas tshang bar bzhangs/*).

locally.²⁵ Neither of these options answers the question of the origin of the Tantra in the Mustang group in a satisfying way.

As can be expected, there are structural agreements between EM and Ts, in particular within the first four volumes of the Tantra section. This, however, is not very conclusive, as a corresponding sequence of texts is also to be found in all the other editions; in the mainstream Kanjurs (i.e. in the Tshal pa, the Them spans ma, and the Mixed groups), as well as in local Kanjurs. Apparently, it reflects an arrangement of texts that existed in *rgyud 'bum* collections prior to the compilation of Kanjurs. It can be found, e.g., in the catalogue of Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147–1216), and it was known, at least partly, also in eleventh–twelfth-century Ladakh.²⁶

Besides, structural commonalities do not provide any information about the texts as such. Even if they appear in the same position and within the same neighbourhood of treatises in related collections, they might represent different versions. The *Hevajratantra* (rKTs and D 417 + 418), e.g. is represented in EM in its revised (Tshal pa) version, and in its unrevised (Them spans ma) version in Ts and X—if the information provided by Ngor chen and the colophons is reliable. If it is true that EM reflects the Kanjur compiled by Ngor chen, and Ts is a copy thereof, one would expect them also to contain the same versions of texts.

For these reasons, and because the accessible Tantra material is not sufficient for a conclusive structural analysis, text-critical analysis has to be applied. For the collections on the whole, this is, obviously, only of limited validity, and it has to be executed on a great number of texts to eventually arrive at a more comprehensive picture.

The *Abhidhānottaratantra* (AUT) was chosen as a starting point, because substantial fragments of it are extant among the findings of Matho (*mang spro*; see below), and valuable information about the oldest version of its Tibetan translation or its oldest line of transmission can be expected from this material. An additional argument for choosing AUT is the fact that it is extant in Sanskrit.

25 See Eimer 1999, 18: “... when several volumes of the Kanjur were destroyed and no complete volume was accessible at one place. It would be quite possible that Nor chen, holding the holy tradition of Mustang in high esteem, collected the scattered texts there and arranged the Tantra following a loose scheme only.”

26 A manuscript among the Matho fragments (K026) contains in immediate succession the *Ratnamāla-tantrarāja* (D 389), *Mahābala-tantrarāja* (D 391), *Jñānamāla-tantrarāja* (D 393), and the *Jñānajvala-tantrarāja* (D 394). Notes between the texts, however, refer to the texts that should follow according to the standard arrangement: *Dam tshig chen po'i rgyud* (*Mahāsamaya-tantrarāja*, D 390) and *Ye shes gsang ba'i rgyud* (*Jñānaguhyā-tantrarāja*, D 392) 'dir 'ong ma yin.

2 The *Abhidhānottaratantra*—Title and Colophons

The commonly known and cited Sanskrit title *Abhidhānottaratantra* is attested only in the Tibetan tradition: e.g., *a bhi dha na utta ra tantra nā ma, mngon par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma zhes bya ba* in Derge. The Sanskrit (acc. Lokesh Chandra 1981) gives it as *Abhidhānottarottara-nāma-mahātantrarāja*. At the ends of its sixty-nine chapters, the text is referred to as *Abhidhānottarottara* (in sixty cases) and *Abhidhānottara* (nine times). The chapters are numbered 1–3, followed by, again, 1–66, which suggests that two texts succeeding the *Śrī Laghusaṃvara* / *Śrī Herukābhidhāna* were combined, an *-uttaratantra* and an *-uttarottaratantra*.²⁷ In Tibetan, on the other hand, the chapters are numbered successively 1–69. It is to be suspected that this formal combination of the two texts was executed already in the Indian tradition at a rather early stage: the only commentary on AUT contained in the Tanjur, the *Rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi snying po 'dus pa Nges par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma rtsa ba rtsa ba'i 'grel pa* (**Mūlatantrahṛdayasaṃgraha Abhidhānottaratantramūla-mūlavṛtti*) by Śūraṅgamavajra (D 1414), counts successively seventy (!) chapters. Similarly, the *Nges par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma'i bla ma rdzogs pa'i rim pa bshad pa* (**Abhidhānottarottaratantranīṣṇannakramavyākhyā*, or similar), an otherwise unknown commentary found among the Matho fragments,²⁸ appears to employ the same system of counting the chapters.

This leads to the assumption that—not very surprisingly—different, presently unknown Sanskrit versions of AUT must exist or have existed. This impression is also supported by several variants in the Tibetan translations (see below). As this question is not of primary concern for the present paper, it shall not be pursued any further.

In Tibetan Kanjurs, this title appears in three different versions, indicating also three different translations,²⁹ which show divergences in two cases: *abhidhāna* is rendered either as *mngon par brjod pa* or as *nges par brjod pa*, and the treatise is specified either as *rgyud bla ma (uttaratantra)* or as *rgyud bla ma'i bla ma (uttarottaratantra)*. Neither is of substantial significance as such,³⁰ but both might be relevant in identifying lines of transmission.

27 On the different interpretations of the term *uttara* as “superior” (*bla ma*) and “posterior” (*phyi ma*) in this context, see Kalff 1979, 9 and 16f.

28 The Matho material (rKTs-T4345) contains the first five folios of this text, covering chap. 1–4 of AUT. Stylistically, there are no obvious reasons to doubt its authentic Indian origin (Péter-Dániel Szántó in an email communication of 2 Sept. 2022). A detailed investigation is still to be carried out.

29 See Eimer 1999, 19f.

30 The commentaries, both composed at an unknown date but presumably based on a Sanskrit text, have *nges par brjod pa* for *abhidhāna* in their titles. Śūraṅgamavajra's

1) *Mngon par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma zhes bya ba*

This title appears in all mainstream Kanjurs. In the *Blue Annals* it is referred to as *Mngon brjod*.³¹ In the colophons, however, it is called *Mngon par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma'i bla ma las gsang ba las gsang ba'i bde mchog gi rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po* in all editions. At the endings of its sixty-nine chapters, too, *rgyud bla ma'i bla ma* is given in sixty-two cases, and *rgyud bla ma* appears only four times. Twice it is called *rgyud bla ma chen po*, and once *rgyud bla ma'i yang bla ma*.³²

This might indicate that *rgyud bla ma'i bla ma (uttarottaratantra)* is actually the initially intended, “correct” specification of the treatise, and *rgyud bla ma (uttaratantra)* in the title is either the result of a singular scribal error that was transmitted consecutively, or the reflection of a confusion that existed already in the Indian tradition.

All the mainstream Kanjurs examined agree that the text was translated and revised (*bsgyur cing zhus*) by Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (in Tshal pa Kanjurs) or Padmakaraśrījñāna (in Them spangs ma) and Rin chen bzang po, revised again (*kyang zhus*) by Jñānaśrī and Khyung po Chos kyi brtson 'grus, and later re-revised (*zhu/zhus dag byas*) by Ānanda and Lo chung (i.e., Legs pa'i shes rab).

2) *Nges par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma zhes bya ba*

This title is transmitted in the collections of Dolpo (Do) and Drakmar, and in the Phugdrag Kanjur (F). It is also mentioned among the Yibri dgon manuscript fragments³³ and in a catalogue of the Orgyan Ling (*o rgyan gling*) Kanjur.³⁴ The colophon of F gives the title as ... *rgyud bla ma'i bla ma*. It is said to be translated and revised (*bsgyur cing zhus*) by Jñānākara and Rig pa gzhon nu, and later corrected (*bcos*) by Prabhākara and ['Brog mi lo tsā ba?] Shākya ye shes. The second copy of this text at Dolpo (see below) mentions a final revision (*sgyur*) by Yon tan shes rab.

In addition, the colophon of F mentions three “other translations” (*'gyur gzhan*), adding that “there are many” of them (*du ma yod*). The first one by Dīpaṃkara and Rin chen bzang po was already discussed above. The second one

commentary (D 1414) gives *rgyud bla ma*, and T4345 (see above, note 28) *rgyud bla ma'i bla ma*. On the different renderings of the term *abhidhāna* in the translation(s) of the root text, see below, note 35. The variant -*uttaratantra* vs. -*uttarottaratantra* is mentioned above.

31 See Roerich 1979, 825.

32 These figures refer to D; the other editions were not examined in detail.

33 See Xiong & Shargan 2022, 16. Only the very beginning of the text (vol. Ga, fol. 18b5–9) is accessible. (Xiong Weibin in an email communication of 29 Nov. 2023.)

34 This Kanjur is not accessible. The information is gained from a modern handwritten *dkar chag* in the possession of the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies at Sarnath.

is ascribed to Chos kyi brtson 'grus, who appears as a reviser of the mainstream translation but is also mentioned in Bu ston's *Chos 'byung* as co-translator of Rin chen bzang po. For the third one, Dharmasribhadra and Rig pa gzhon nu are stated as translators. The latter, however, appears already as co-translator of Jñānākara in the Do – F version.

3) *Nges par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma'i bla ma zhes bya ba'i rgyud gyi rgyal po chen po*

This form of the title corresponds exactly to the Sanskrit. It is transmitted in Matho (Ma), in the Kanjurs of Basgo (X) and Tsarang (Ts), and in Hemis Gold (Hg).³⁵ Bu ston (1290–1364) in his Tantra catalogue (BuT Nr 008)³⁶ and EM (Nr 009) lists the same version of the title. A revealing note in EM reads: *bod na a bi dha na 'am mngon brjod bla ma zhes grags pa ...*, suggesting that the version with *nges par brjod pa* and *rgyud bla ma'i bla ma* represents an older version which was not commonly used any more at the time of Ngor chen.

There is no colophon extant in Ma, but the colophons of X and Ts appear to say that a translation by unnamed authors was reworked or substantially revised (*bcos bsggyur*)³⁷ by Kumāra and Byang chub shes rab, and this translation was revised or corrected (*bcos*) by Jñānaśrī, Blo gros snying po, and Rab zhi.³⁸

35 Contrarily, in the root text, the *Śrī Laghusaṃvara* or *Śrī Herukābhidhāna* (D 368), the term *abhidhāna* is rendered by *mngon par brjod pa* at chapter endings in X, Ts, and F 437, while the mainstream Kanjurs, F 438, and Do have *nges par brjod pa* in their colophons and/or chapter endings.

36 See Eimer 1989.

37 The uncommon term *bcos bsggyur* is not to be found in the Kanjurs of D, J, and H (e-texts) or Do, and in X and Ts the present case is its only occurrence. The colophon of the *Guhyaśamājatantra* in Phugdrag (F 415), however, has the expression *bcos shing bsggyur* ("corrected and translated"?) (see Almogi 2020, 211 and 193 note 250). The same form is attested also in Do rgyud Ka (N84), 104b7. X (rgyud Ja, 165b5), Ts (rgyud Cha, 86a6), and Z 418 have *bsgyur cing bcos* instead. D 442 reads *bsgyur cing zhus*, and S 408 only *bcos*. Anticipating the results of the text-critical analysis (below), however, I understand *bcos bsggyur* as indicating a substantial revision, possibly even amounting to a re-translation on the basis of another one.

The terminology concerning the various degrees of modification executed in the various steps of revision, from mere proofreading to re-translating, do not appear to be defined in any way. Besides, "different people might have different notions of what could be called revision, retranslation, new translation, etc. ..." (Orna Almogi in an email communication of 9 Oct. 2021).

38 The colophons read: *ston 'byung brnyas min bla ma'i bka skul phyir/ |mkhas mchog ku ma ra dang lotstsha ba/ |dge slong byang chub shes rab ces bya bas/ bcos bsggyur gtan la phab la mkhas/ mchog 'di la ni bzad pa mdzad/ rgya gar gyi mkhan po chen po dznya na shri dang/ dge slong blo gros snying po dang/ dge slong rab zhis [: bzhis] bcos nas gtan la phab pa'o/|.*

One of these unnamed translators could be Rin chen bzang po, but there is doubt about his co-translator. It could be Dīpaṅkara (Rin chen bzang po’s co-translator of the mainstream version), as claimed in a list of “other translations” added to the colophon of F. Equally, there is doubt about the revisers. The situation is not clear at all, and it adds to the question of authenticity and reliability of colophons and catalogues.³⁹

BuT names Kumāra and Mang ’or byang chub shes rab as translators, which means that their activity (called *bcos bsgyur* in the colophons of X and Ts) is considered a new translation in its own right. BuCh (Nr 1478), on the other hand, lists a *bshad pa’i rgyud A bhi dha na*, which seems to be the same text, translated by Rin chen bzang po and Chos kyi brtson ’grus (who appears as a reviser of the mainstream version). Adding to the confusion, EM identifies the revisers mentioned in X and Ts, i.e., Jñānaśrī, Blo gros snying po, and Rab zhi, as translators.

This puzzle will not be solved here, but a connection of some kind between these two translations could explain why Jñānaśrī is mentioned as a reviser of both of them, which would be rather uncommon otherwise.

3 Text-Critical Analysis

Considering the potential history of every individual manuscript, it can by no means be taken for granted that the extant Sanskrit versions of the text currently known to us are the direct source of its Tibetan translation(s). In our particular case, all three Tibetan translations clearly predate not only the edited Sanskrit manuscript from the mid-seventeenth century, but also the oldest known witness, a palm-leaf manuscript from the mid-twelfth century.⁴⁰ Nothing can be said about the text-historical position of these manuscripts, but there is some—albeit not too conclusive—evidence of the edited Sanskrit version not being exactly identical with the basis of the Tibetan translations (see below, examples 2 and 3). Keeping this general limitation in mind, the Sanskrit version is used only for a rough comparison.

The main issue of this study is the relation of the Kanjurs of the Mustang group to each other and to the mainstream Kanjurs, and no comprehensive stemma of the Tibetan translations of AUT is intended. Attempting to keep the

39 On this topic, see Almogi 2020.

40 These dates are according to Péter-Dániel Szántó (email communication of 23 Dec. 2022), who dates the edited manuscript to Nepālasamvat 761 = 1640 CE and the palm-leaf manuscript to Nepālasamvat 258 = 1137/8 CE.

number of Kanjurs compared as low as possible, but as high as necessary, each of the commonly accepted groups is represented only by one or two witnesses.

The following eight Tibetan canonical versions are systematically compared. The reference numbers of the texts are those of the rKts website (when available):

- Tshal pa group: Derge (D 369);
- Them spangs ma group: Stog (S 335) and Shey (Z 345);
- Mixed group: Lhasa (H 385);
- Independent Kanjurs: Phugdrag (F 446);
- Mustang group: Dolpo (Do rgyud Nga = N78⁴¹ 1b1–184a7), Basgo (X rgyud Ka 49a1–216b7),⁴² and Tsarang (Ts 02.2).

Of those, Do apparently represents the physically oldest manuscript. It has string holes and maintains some features of old orthography, in particular the *ma-ya btags* (used consistently) and the *da drag* (used frequently). For a portion missing in Do (N78), the fragmentary copy of Do rgyud Nga (N79) 86a1–142b7 is consulted. Although the two copies show variants, they are without differentiation treated as one source in this study, as they largely agree in relevant cases. However, the passage of N79 will not be referred to in the present paper, and all references are to volume N78.

In addition to the Mustang group Kanjurs, major importance in this analysis is gained by the pre-Kanjur manuscript dating from the eleventh to twelfth century, which was discovered among the fragments of Matho.⁴³ They contain fragments of three manuscripts of AUT. The longest of them (K023 on the rKts website, henceforth referred to as Ma) consists of seventy-nine folios, which is roughly half of the entire text. The other two small fragments (K022, four folios, and K025, eight folios) appear not to contain relevant variants and are not compared in the present study.

Six more Kanjur editions are consulted only when it appears to be necessary or feasible: Peking (Q 17) and Lithang (J 362) from the Tshal pa group, and London (L rgyud Ka 275a3–423a5), Ulaanbaatar (V 404), and Tashiyangtse Dzong (Ty 056–002) from the Them spangs ma group. Drakmar (rgyud Nga

41 N78 is the number of this volume in the handlist of Heller 2009, Appendix 1. As the Dolpo material, in particular its Tantra section, is not fully catalogued, these numbers are added for easier identification.

42 An almost complete copy of the text was identified among the Basgo fragments after the completion of this paper. It shares essential features with the full Kanjur of Basgo and apparently represents the same version.

43 See Tauscher 2019. Matho Monastery was founded only in 1410, and it is probably safe to assume that the manuscripts originate from the nearby monastery of Nyar ma, founded by Rin chen bzang po.

1b1–150a7) from the Mustang group became available after the completion of this paper and is accessed only in a few selected cases. It appears to be very close to Do and might be a copy of it.

The chapter titles do not show major variants that need to be discussed in the present context. However, the titles of chapters 31–33 of all other editions appear as 33, 31, 32 in X and Ts. One might suspect a different version of the text, with a different arrangement of the chapters, but this is not the case. The reason for this deviation is the simple fact that one folio, containing the end of chapter 33, was misplaced in the copy that served as the model of X – Ts.⁴⁴ This resulted in an inconsistency in the chapter numbers, which was discovered and “corrected” by the copyist. The wrong sequence in foliation and textual conflicts, on the other hand, went unnoticed.

In addition, a passage from the beginning of chapter 33 in X is found at the beginning of chapter 34 in Ts. This means that one more folio was misplaced in the copy of the X-version which served as the model of Ts.⁴⁵

Apart from this disorder of folios, the text of both X and Ts clearly represents the version of Ma. This leads to a relative chronology Ma – X – Ts.

As the sixty-nine chapters of AUT cover some 168 folios in X (147 in Ts), a detailed text-critical analysis of the entire text would go beyond the scope of this paper, and some sort of selection is unavoidable. Solving the puzzle of the misplaced folios already required a good deal of collating, and, making use of this preliminary work, the analysis in this study is generally restricted to chapters 31–34.

The results of this analysis shall be presented in a short summary, illustrated by only a few random examples. The Sanskrit cited is based on the facsimile edition of Lokesh Chandra (1981) and the transcript prepared by Péter-Dániel Szántó of both the edition and a palm-leaf manuscript; references are to the published edition (page, line). As the Sanskrit is not the subject of the present study, it shall be neither translated nor analyzed. English renderings are based on the Tibetan, and they are merely paraphrases; no exact and polished translation is claimed or attempted.

Merely orthographic variants or obvious misspellings without text-critical relevance within the Tibetan are not taken account of.

44 The text of X 152a4–153a4 = Ts 127b6–128b7 follows X 146a1 = Ts 121b3.

45 The folios containing the text of X 152a4–153a4 = Ts 127b6–128b8 and X 153a3–154b5 = Ts 126b6–127b6 changed places.

4 Comparing Mainstream Kanjurs

In general, the mainstream Kanjurs do not show essential differences. There are, of course, variants characteristic of the Tshal pa and the Them spangs ma groups, including the different Indian translators mentioned (Dīpaṃ-karaśrījñāna in Tshal pa vs. Padmakaraśrījñāna in Them spangs ma), but as they are not generally relevant for our purpose, they are not analysed in detail.

Within the Them spangs ma tradition, however, evidence can be found of two sub-branches, one consisting of V, L, T and another Bhutanese – Ladakhi (S, Z) one,⁴⁶ whose readings are frequently shared by H. Agreement and disagreement of the two branches applies also to obvious or apparent scribal errors. Here, again, evidence is not traced systematically, but variants between Tshal pa and Them spangs ma as well as within the Them spangs ma tradition are documented in the examples below (examples 3 and 4) when they occur in passages discussed for other reasons.

5 Comparing Mainstream Kanjurs to Dolpo and Phugdrag

The colophons of Do and F identify this version as a distinct translation, without mentioning any antecedent. It is, however, very close to the mainstream translation (see, e.g., examples 2 and 3), and it has to be considered a revision rather than a distinct translation. Samten notes that there are “big differences” between F and the mainstream translation,⁴⁷ but, apart from a great number of omissions in F, this cannot be confirmed within the four chapters examined in the present study; there are only few and minor textual variants that, nevertheless, testify to a certain degree of independence, as they are shared by Do and F (see, e.g., the obvious scribal error *si la* vs. *pi la*, example 3; the variant *thob par* vs. *thod par*, example 4; or *rnams* vs. *brgyad*, example 7). The more “substantial” variants are of the following kind:

46 This subdivision of the Them spangs ma group becomes evident also from the observations in Viehbeck and Lainé 2022, 35ff.

47 Samten 1992, 163, n. 1: ... *gyur mi 'dra ba'i khyad par chen po 'dug*. The English part of the note merely refers to the mainstream version of the text. The Dolpo manuscripts were not known at that time.

5.1 Example 1

Skt 189,2; D 319a4, S 166b6, Z 169a1f., Ty 157a6, V 381a5, L 362a6, H 247a2, F 293a2;
Do Nga 109a5, Ma 80a1f., X Ka 147b4f., Ts Kha 123a1f.

si[d]dhyate ḍākinīcakram ṣaṭmāsaikena sādhaḥaḥ ||

In the mainstream translation, this reads:

/zla ba drug gis sgrub pa po/ |mkha' 'gro ma yi 'khor lo 'grub/

and in Ma – X – Ts, interchanging the sequence of these two *pāda*:

/mkha' 'gro ma yi 'khor lo ni/ |sgrub pos zla ba drug gis 'grub/

This could be understood as meaning:

—The *ḍākinī maṇḍala* is accomplished by the practitioner within six months.—

Do and F, however, opposing all other versions, read:

/zla ba drug bsgoms (b)sgrub pa po/ |mkha' 'gro ma yi 'khor lo 'grub/

—[By] the practice [of] six months, the practitioner accomplishes the *ḍākinī maṇḍala*.—

Either version is perfectly understandable, and the emendations required are equally justified in terms of content, but the Sanskrit does not provide any reference to the term “practice” (*bsgoms*) of Do and F.

With very few and insignificant exceptions, these two versions agree on their variant readings. Their main difference lies in the number of omissions. Within the four chapters examined, not less than twenty-five *pāda* of the mainstream translation are absent from F. Only two of these omissions are shared by Do. Twelve *pāda* (i.e., three successive *śloka*, equal to D 318b1–3) are missing at the beginning of F 292a4. This passage is not extant in either copy of Do, but it is preserved in Drakmar where the same three *śloka* are omitted (88a2), and this scribal error can be expected for Do as well. It can be explained by the fact that the last verse contained in F ends in *g.yas brgyang pa'i gnas pas* (*pa yi zhabs kyis* D) *bzhugs*, and also *pāda* d of the third verse omitted reads (in D) *g.yas*

brgyang pa yi zhabs kyi bzhugs, so that the passage in between could easily have been overlooked.

Be this as it may, there are still eleven *pāda* missing exclusively in F. The general situation shows that Do cannot be a copy of F. Unless the scribe of F was particularly careless, and all these eleven omissions that are shared neither by Do nor by Drakmar are individual errors, we can assume that Do is not only preserved in the physically older manuscript, but also represents an earlier stage of textual development. It is, however, not the direct model of F.

6 Comparing Mainstream Kanjurs to Matho – Basgo – Tsarang

As the mainstream Kanjurs contain neither significant variants among themselves nor to the Dolpo – Phugdrag line, particular attention has to be given to the Matho – Basgo – Tsarang version. The information gained from colophons and catalogues suggest it to be a substantial revision (*bcos bsgyur*) of an older translation, possibly the one of Rin chen bzang po, which is represented in the mainstream Kanjurs. Some of the variants, however, rather hint at a separate and largely independent translation by Kumāra(kalaśa) and (Mang 'or) Byang chub shes rab, who might, nevertheless, have consulted Rin chen bzang po's translation in their work.

In some cases, this version is clearly closer to the edited Sanskrit text than the mainstream translation.

6.1 Example 2

Skt 183,6; D 317a1f., S 163b4, Z 165b3, H 243b2f., F 289b7; Do Nga 106a4, Ma 77b7f., X Ka 145b5f., Ts Kha 121b1f.

vajrollālanatarjanyā karadvayavibhūṣitām |
kapālakhaṭvāṅgadharā ḍamarughañṭāvibhūṣitām ||

In the mainstream Kanjurs, Do, and F, this stanza is represented by only three *pāda*:

/rdo rje gsor zhing sdigs mdzub kyi/ |gnyis su med par rnam par brgyan/
/thod pa gnyis med rnam brgyan te/

Here, the correspondent of ... *dharā ḍamarughanṭā* ... (end of the third and beginning of the fourth *pāda*) is missing. In addition, the term *karadvaya* (“pair of hands”) in the second *pāda* appears as *gnyis sumed par* (“nondually”, *advaya*-). Contextually, this translation does not make any obvious sense, but it could be due to the omission of the syllable *kara*, reading ... *janyā-advaya* ... instead of ... *janyā karadvaya*. ... This, however, does not explain how the skull-topped staff *khaṭvāṅga* in the third *pāda*, too, could turn into *gnyis med*.

Both omissions might be due to an error of the translator(s), or to a corruption of the Sanskrit source. In either case they give evidence of a close relation between the Tibetan translations 1 (mainstream Kanjurs) and 2 (Do, F), and of the independence of translation 3 (Ma, X, Ts).

Ma – X – Ts provide a fairly literal equivalent of the edited Sanskrit:

*|rdo rje gsor zhing sdigs 'dzub kyis| |phyag gnyis dag ni rnam par brgyan/
|thod pa dang ni khwa tam 'dzin| |cang te'u dang ni dril bur ldan|*

—Brandishing the *vajra* and making a menacing gesture,
their two pairs of hands are adorned [in the following way]:
[One of the *ḍākinīs*] holds skull and *khaṭvāṅga*, [the other] drum and bell.—

In other passages, the relation between Sanskrit and Tibetan texts is not equally clear.

6.2 Example 3

Skt 183,2–4; D 316b5–7, Q 172a4–6, J 167a4–6, S 163a6–b1, Z 165a5–8, Ty 153b7–154a3, V 378a7–b1, L 359a7–b1, H 243a4–7, F 289b2–4; Do Nga 105b6–106a1, Ma 77b4f., X 145a8–b2, Ts 121a5–7.

vāmadakṣiṇapārśve tu nīlavaraṇaḍākinīyā dve ca yojitā |

The simple message of this verse, i.e., that two blue-coloured *ḍākinīs* are placed on the left and right side (of the central deity), however, is in conflict with the *vajraḍākinī* Dharmottarā's “different colors” (*viśvavarṇā[m]*, *sna tshogs mdog can*) mentioned in the following verse, and the Tibetan versions all agree on a different message:

*|g.yon dang g.yas pa'i ngos (kyi logs Ma, X, Ts) dag tu/
|pi (si Do, F) la dang ni nye pi la/
|mkha' 'gro ma ni gnyis po sbyar (gnyis sbyar ba Ma, X, Ts)|*

The first and the third Tibetan *pāda* match the Sanskrit perfectly, but instead of mentioning the *ḍākinī*s' color, the Tibetan refers to categories of their sacred site, their "house" (*khyim*): *pi la* (*pīlava*) and *nye* [*ba'i*] *pi la* (*upapīlava*) in the second *pāda*. One of these versions perhaps represents "a gloss that intruded into the main text,"⁴⁸ and of the two versions, the edited Sanskrit seems more likely to be the "intruder."⁴⁹ This matter shall not be investigated in the present context; here, it may suffice to note that, at least in this particular case, the underlying Sanskrit must have been the same for all Tibetan translations, but different from the edited manuscript.

This result, however, is not confirmed by the following verses. The text continues:

dharmmottarā nāma vajraḍākinī dhaṃkāreṇa vāmato nyaset ||
 [**tathā/evaṃ dakṣiṇato nyaset (?)*]⁵⁰ *siṃkāre sāgarottamā nāma vajraḍākinī*
viśvavarṇā[ṃ] viśvamukhāṃ trinetraṃ vikṛtānanām |
ardhaparyāṅkam āsīnām sanṛtyapadayojitām ||

This passage reads in the mainstream Kanjurs, Do, and F:

/chos kyi mchog ces bya ba yi/ |rdo rje mkha' 'gro ma nyid ni/
/yi ge dwaṃ las yang dag 'byung/ |g.yon gyi phyogs su dgod par bya/
/yi ge si(m) las nges byung ba/ |rgya mtsho'i mchog ces bya ba yi (ni F)/
/rdo rje mkha' 'gro ma nyid (gnyis S, Z, Ty, V, L, H, Do, F) ni/
*[*g.yas kyi phyogs su dgod par bya]*
/sna tshogs mdog can sna tshogs zhal/ |spyan gsum pa la bzhin nram (rnames Do,
F) sgyur/
/skyil krung phyed pas gnas pa ste/ |zhabs ni gar dang bcas pa'o/

—The vajraḍākinī Dharmottarā, emerging from the letter *dwaṃ*,
 is placed to the left.

Emerging from the letter *si(m)*, the vajraḍākinī Sāgarottamā [is placed to the right].

48 Péter-Dániel Szántó in an email communication of 4 Oct. 2022.

49 Śūraṅgamavajra's commentary (D 1414, 195a3), in agreement with the Tibetan versions, mentions *pīlava* and *upapīlava* in this context (*rgya mtsho mchog ma pi la pa ste khyim dang/ |g.yon du chos kyi mchog ma nye ba'i pi la ste nye ba'i khyim pa*), but no blue color for the *ḍākinī*s.

50 This emendation was suggested by Paul Harrison in an email communication of 20 Dec. 2022. In this case, the omission of the *pāda* could be explained by an eye-skip from the first *nyaset* to the second.

[Of these two vajraḍākinīs, one] has various faces in different colors,
 [the other] has three eyes and a contorted face.
 [One] sits in half-cross-legged position, [the other] has dancing feet.—

Obviously, one *pāda* is missing from this passage, in Sanskrit as well as in Tibetan, containing the information about the right side (*dakṣiṇa*, *g.yas*, as opposed to *vāmata*, *g.yon*) of the scene, as it would be expected from the introductory sentence. This suggests the Tibetan translations 1 and 2 to be based on the same Sanskrit version as preserved in the edited text. At one point, however, this *pāda* must have been there in the Tibetan translation. Otherwise, the preceding sentence would—rather absurdly—end in ... *ni*. Alternatively, the following iconographic description of the two deities would refer only to Sāgarottamā. Apparently, the versions of Them spangs ma, H, Do, and F: *mkha' 'gro ma gnyis ni* vs. ... *nyid ni* of the Tshal pa Kanjurs represents an attempt to avoid these consequences and make clear that the following description refers to both ḍākinīs. This fact is explicitly indicated neither in Sanskrit nor in any other Tibetan version, but is obvious from the content. Still, the preceding sentence would end in ... *ces bya ba yi* or ... *ces bya ba ni* (F), and the amended *pāda* is equally required.

Ma – X – Ts, on the other hand, convey the same message in a short version. The content of the first two stanzas is expressed in only one, which includes, however, the information that Sāgarottamā is placed to the right:

/g.yon du dham las mka' 'gro ma/ |chos mchog ma zhes bya ba dgod/
/g.yas su sim las mkha' 'gro ma/ |rgya mtsho'i mchog ma zhes bya dgod/
/sna tshogs mdog can sna tshogs zhal/ |spyan gsum pa la bzhin rnam [: rnam]
'gyur/
/dkyil dkrung phyed pas gnas pa ste/ |zhabs ni gar dang bcas pa'o/

—To the left [emerging] from [the letter] *dham*, the ḍākinī Dharmottarā is placed.

To the right [emerging] from [the letter] *sim*, the ḍākinī Sāgarottamā is placed.

[Of these two ḍākinīs, one] has various faces in different colors,

[the other] has three eyes and a contorted face.

[One] sits in half-cross-legged position, [the other] has dancing feet.—

These differences certainly do not result from accidental omissions. Rather, we have to assume different translations, possibly even made from different Sanskrit versions.

The Do – F line agrees with the mainstream version in general, but it strikingly shares the obviously erroneous reading *bzhin rnams 'gyur : bzhin rnam 'gyur* (representing *vikṛtānanām*) of Ma – X – Ts in the second *pāda* of the last stanza.

The majority of variants, however, show clearly distinct translations that are, nonetheless, more or less equally close to the Sanskrit.

6.3 Example 4

Skt 189,2f.; D319a4, S 166b6f., Z 169a2f., Ty 157a6f., V 381a5f., L 362a6f., H 247a2f., F 293a2f.; Do Nga 109a6, Ma 80a2, X Ka 147b4f., Ts Kha 123a2

niḥsaṃśa[: sa]yaṃ parāṃ siddhi herukākāratā prāpnute ||
acireṇaiva kāl[: r]eṇa khecaratvaṃ na saṃśayaḥ [: śaṃśayaḥ] ||

In a fairly literal translation, the mainstream Kanjurs, H, Do, and F read:

|yid gnyis med par (myed—Do) dngos grub mchog/
|mkha' 'gro thod par (thob par Do, F) byed pa yin (yi S, Z, Ty)/
|dus 'dir de ma thag tu yang/ |mkha' la spyod par the tshom med/

—Doubtlessly, the supreme accomplishment
 of [taking] the shape of a *ḍāka/ḍākinī* is gained.
 Immediately, also [the accomplishment of] flying [is gained] without doubt.—

Striking, but possibly without particular relevance, is the fact that in the second *pāda* *heruka* is rendered by *mka' 'gro* in all Tibetan versions, including Ma, X, and Ts, while elsewhere in the text it appears in transliterated form as *he ru ka* or *he ru*.

Apparently, the version *thob par byed pa* (representing *prāpnute*) of Do and F has to be preferred to *thod par byed pa* of the mainstream Kanjurs. This contextually minor variant might nonetheless illustrate a certain independence of Do – F from the mainstream tradition.

Similarly, the variant *byed pa yi* (S, Z, Ty) vs. *byed pa yin* in all other mainstream versions represents in all probability nothing but a scribal error,⁵¹ but it

⁵¹ In the mainstream translation, the genitive case indicator *yi* does not make sense. It is, on the other hand, required within the sequence of *pāda* of the Ma – X – Ts version. In order to classify this variant as a voluntary correction, we would have to assume a particular version of the mainstream translation with the sequence of *pāda* of Ma – X – Ts and a

gives evidence of the close connection within the Bhutanese – Ladakhi branch of the Them spangs ma Kanjurs.

In Ma – X – Ts, the same stanza reads:

*/mkha' 'gro'i nram pa thob pa yi/ |dngos grub mchog la the tshom med/
/yun mi ring ba nyid du ni/ |mkha' spyod 'gyur bar gdon mi za/*

—There is no doubt about [attaining] the supreme accomplishment of gaining the form of a *ḍāka/ḍākinī*.

Before long, the [accomplishment of] flying is certain[ly gained].—

Apart from interchanging the first two *pāda*, slightly different formulations, and vocabulary, this translation closely resembles the mainstream version. Nevertheless, it evokes the impression of a certain degree of independence.

7 Comparing Matho to Basgo and Tsarang

In general, all these three versions are fairly identical in every respect. In case of variants among them, X and Ts agree against Ma, with very few and insignificant exceptions. This includes three accidentally omitted *pāda*. It can, however, be excluded that they are direct copies.

Within the passage analysed in this study, the only major variant among this group of Kanjurs is an additional *pāda* preserved in X and Ts, which shows that these two do not directly depend on Ma.

7.1 Example 5

Skt. 184,1; D 317a3, S 163b6, Z 165b6, H 243b5, F 290a2f.; Do Nga 106a6f., Ma 78a1, X Ka 145b8–146a1 + 152a4, Ts Kha 121b3 + 127b6.

teṣā[m] hṛdi trayo bhāvyāṃ kāyavākcittaḍākajām |

These two *pāda* appear to be represented in the mainstream Kanjurs by:

genesis of the variant in two steps: a) changing the sequence of *pāda*, b) correcting *yi* to *yin*. This would testify to the Bhutanese – Ladakhi branch representing an older version of the Them spangs ma line. However, we do not have any evidence to support such a speculative assumption.

/sku gsung thugs kyi mkha' 'gro ni/ |rang gi snying gar de dag bsgom/

and in Ma:

/de rnams snying kar sku gsung thugs/ mkha'gro gsum ni bsgom par bya/

These two versions seem to be fairly equally matching, yet clearly independent renderings of the Sanskrit. Representing *teṣāṃ* by *de rnams* [*kyi*] (“their”) instead of *rang gi*—which could easily be mistaken for “one’s own”—and by explicitly mentioning three *ḍāka*, Ma seems to be a little closer to the Sanskrit.

—In their (i.e., of the *jñānaḍākinī* and the *jñānaḍāka* mentioned in the previous stanza) heart(s), the three *ḍāka* of body, speech, and mind should be visualised.—

X and Ts question this overall assessment. They preserve an additional *pāda*, providing the information that the *jñānaḍākinī* and *ḍāka* should be visualised in their terrifying forms (*snying du 'jigs mdzad*, **hṛdayambhīṣaṇa*?):

X: /de rnams snying du 'jigs mdzad cing/ ^(152a4) |rang gi snying khar sku gsung thugs/

/mkha' 'gro gsum ni bsgom par bya/

Ts: /de rnams snying du 'jigs mdzad cing/ ^(127b6) |snying khar sku gsung thugs/

/mkha' 'gro gsum ni bsgom par bya/

—They should be visualized in terrifying form, and in their heart(s), the three *ḍāka* of body, speech, and mind.—

In this version, *rang gi snying khar* is much more accurate than in the mainstream translation. Directly linking to *de rnams* of the first *pāda*, it does not give room to the potential misunderstanding indicated above. The fact that this variant occurs exactly at the point of intersection with a misplaced folio might be coincidence, but it could account for omitting the first two syllables of the second *pāda* (*rang gi*) in Ts.

The omission of this passage in Ma could easily be explained as a scribal error (an eye-skip from *snying du* to *snying khar*), but it would certainly require a great coincidence to make this happen only within a passage that is also missing in Sanskrit. Still, at the present stage I have no better explanation to offer. “Coincidence” is certainly not a scholarly category, but it happens.

Whatever the genesis of this variant might be, and which version might be more authentic, this passage shows two things:

- a) The Sanskrit version represented in Lokesh Chandra 1981 might be the basis of the mainstream translation, but most certainly not of the (Ma –) X – Ts translation.
- b) X and Ts do not directly depend on Ma.

7.2 Example 6

A variant of minor textual relevance illustrates that Ts does not directly depend on X, though it represents a younger stage in the development of this line of textual transmission.

Skt. 197,1; D 322a2f., S 171a3, Z 173b4, H 245a1, F 291a5; Do Nga 113b5, Ma 83a2f., X Ka 153a5, Ts Kha 126b2

tatra madhye mahāvajraṃ

This *pāda* reads in Ma (and in all mainstream Kanjurs as well as in Do and F):

/de yi dbus su rdo rje che/

Instead, X has:

/de yi 'bras bu bde ba che/

and Ts:

/de'i 'bras bu rdo rje che/

The reading *'bras bu* vs. *dbus su* (*madhye*) reflects nothing but a scribal error in the model of X and Ts, but it illustrates the close relation of these two versions against Ma. Similarly, *bde ba che* vs. *rdo rje che* (*mahāvajra*) is to be taken as an individual variant—a scribal error again—of X.

7.3 Example 7

A deviation of X and Ts from Ma (and all other editions) appears in a list of the eight nāga kings.

Skt 197,4f.; D 322a5f., S 171a7–b2, Z 174a2f., H 252a2–4, F 297b4f.; Do Nga 114a3f., Ma 83a6f., X Ka 153b2f., Ts Kha 126b6f.

aṣṭapatre aṣṭau nāgarājā likhet / anantavāsukitakṣakapadmamahāpadmau
śaṃkhapālakarkoṭako 'navataptā śīta[: sita]nīlaraktā haritapītadhūmradhūsara
haritapītā /
/dab ma brgyad la klu brgyad bri/ /mtha'yas dang ni nor rgyas dang/
/jog po padma padma che/ /dung skyong dang ni stobs kyi rgyu/
/dga' bo dang ni (ma dros pa dang X, ma dros pa'i Ts) brgyad (rnams Do, F)
yin te/ /dkar po sngo dang dmar dang ljang/
/ser dang dud pa'i mdog can te/ /ljang gu dang ni ser po ste/

—On eight petals eight nāga [kings] are drawn: Ananta, Vāsuki,
 Takṣaka, Padma, Mahāpadma, Śaṃkhapāla, Karkoṭaka,
 and Nanda, in the colors white, blue, red, green,
 yellow, smoke-colored, green, and yellow.—

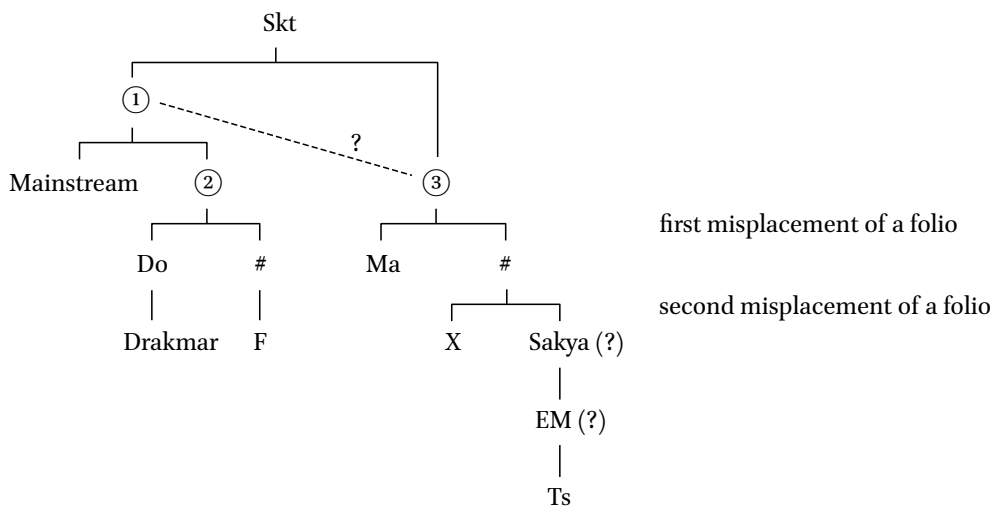
All the Tibetan versions consulted agree on the basic wording of these two verses. However, deviating from the Sanskrit, they list Nanda (*dga' bo*) as the eighth nāga king. Only X and Ts agree with Skt and give Anavatapta (*ma dros pa*) instead. According to the other variants found in this text, it is obvious that X and Ts represent the same translation as Ma, and the origin of this variant is unclear.

In the same *pāda*, Do and F agree against all other versions by giving the plural indicator *rnams* instead of the numeral *brgyad* at the end of the list of names.

8 Resumé and Open Questions

The text-critical analysis confirms the three Tibetan translations indicated by the titles and colophons. All three probably originate from a relatively short period of time between end of the tenth and the mid-eleventh century, but no reasonably exact dates can be determined for most of the persons involved, their relative chronology remaining unestablished. It seems to be justified to consider Rin chen bzang po's translation the oldest, but the sequence of translation 2 and 3 is largely hypothetical and could be the other way around as well. For the present issue this is of no relevance.

With this restriction, our analysis suggests the following relations and lines of transmission of the *Abhidhānottaratantra* in Tibetan translation:



Skt In this schematic diagram, the Sanskrit model is hypothetically taken as one entity, regardless of possible different versions.

① *Mgon par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma* by Rin chen bzang po (958–1055)⁵² and Dīpaṃkara-śrījñāna/Padmakaraśrījñāna; revised, at a final step, by Ānanda and Legs pa'i shes rab (*lo chung*, tenth century).

② *Nges par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma* by Jñānākara and Rig pa gzhon nu (eleventh century); revised by Prabhākara (ca. tenth century) and ('Broḡ mi lo tsā ba?) Shākya ye shes (992/993–1043/1072).

③ *Nges par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma'i bla ma* by Kumāra and Mang 'or Byang chub shes rab (ca. eleventh century); revised by Jñānaśrī, Blo gros snying po, and Rab zhi.

FIGURE 5.1 Schematic diagram of relations and lines of transmission of the *Abhidhānottaratantra* in Tibetan translation

Of the three translations of the *Abhidhānottaratantra*, the oldest is represented in the mainstream Kanjurs, and probably it is also the one referred to in the *Blue Annals*. The two younger ones are restricted to Western Tibet and the Mustang Group Kanjurs, but that does not necessarily imply that they might not be or have been included in presently unknown canonical collections from other parts of Tibet as well.

Uncommon Tantra texts shared not only by the Mustang Group Kanjurs of Dolpo, Basgo, and Hemis, but also by the Newark Kanjur from Bathang in

52 All dates are according to the website of BDRC (legacy.tbrc.org; accessed 23 Nov. 2022), without any further research on this topic.

Eastern Tibet and Orgyan Ling from Tawang in modern-day Arunachal Pradesh testify to a repertoire of texts once commonly known but, for whatever reasons, not included in the mainstream Kanjurs. Structural commonalities of the Dolpo and Newark Kanjurs,⁵³ too, can hardly result from a direct relation. More likely, they reflect traces of an older way of presenting Tantra texts that was, to whatever extent and originating from wherever, commonly used in Tibet. For whatever reason, however, older features with regard to texts and textual versions as well as to their arrangement can generally be observed within the Mustang group, i.e., in Western Tibet, to a greater extent than within material from elsewhere, and it is probably justified to call it a “Western Tibetan tradition,” even if not all of its features might actually be of Western Tibetan origin.

In our particular case, this means that the oldest translation is maintained in the possibly youngest line of transmission. The Matho line definitely predates the compilation of the Old Narthang Kanjur. In the case of Dolpo, the situation is not that clear. A detailed dating of these manuscripts is still demanded; depending on its results, the origin of this line might be considered roughly contemporary with either Old Narthang or with Tshal pa, respectively.

Translation 2, with the title *Nges par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma*, extant in the Kanjurs of Dolpo, Drakmar, and Phugdrag, might not actually represent a distinct and independent translation; it is closely related to translation 1, in all probability depending on it. With the rendering *abhidhāna* in the title by *nges par brjod pa*, however, it agrees with translation 3, but it has to remain undecided whether this fact might indicate some relation between them. Most probably it does not; the passages examined in this study do not provide any evidence of a mutual relation of the translations 2 and 3.

Two more members might be added to this “line” of transmission, which presently consists of only three known members, with at least one more postulated. In both cases, however, the identification is only hypothetical, and this possible relation is not indicated in the schematic diagram above: A fragment from Yibri dgon in the Ngari Prefecture of the PRC preserves the same form of the title, but as only the first five lines of the text seem to be extant (see note 23) the identification with this particular translation of the *Abhidhānottaratantra* can only be assumed. Similarly, the same title is listed also in a catalogue of the Orgyan Ling Kanjur (see note 34), but it is not known whether this commonality is restricted to the catalogue entry or to the title, or whether Orgyan Ling actually contains the same version of the text. This question can be answered only after the Orgyan Ling Kanjur has become accessible.

53 Volume rnying rgyud Ga of Dolpo (N56) resembles to a considerable extent volume rgyud A of Newark/Bathang, both with regard to content and to the arrangement of texts.

In the case of Dolpo and Phugdrag, on the other hand, it might be justified to assume a relation that goes beyond this particular text and extends to the collections more broadly; apart from the *Abhidhānottara*, there are other agreements between Do and F, including cases of preserving the same version/translation of a text, different from all other Kanjur editions.⁵⁴ This assumption, however, is based only on random observations, and it needs to be verified by detailed analysis. Equally, the exact nature of this assumed relation and the possible role it might have played in arranging the Tantra sections of the Mustang group Kanjurs remain open questions for the time being.

Translation 3, titled *Nges par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma'i bla ma*, was, according to Bu ston, prepared by Mang 'or Byang chub shes rab in collaboration with the Indian *paṇḍita* Kumāra(kalaśa?). It is preserved among the manuscript fragments from Matho (eleventh/twelfth century), the physically oldest textual witness extant of a Tibetan translation of the *Abhidhānottaratantra*. It is also listed in the Tantra catalogue of Bu ston (fourteenth century). If the information that Ngor chen brought the Tantra section from Sakya when compiling the Kanjur of Lo (see note 24) applies also to this text, this translation was still extant in the fifteenth century in Central Tibet (Sakya), as it is included in the Early Mustang Kanjur. If I interpret the note in the EM catalogue (above) correctly, however, it was not the standard version anymore; it was generally replaced by Rin chen bzang po's translation in the mainstream tradition and survived only in the Kanjurs of the Mustang group. There was an awareness of it in seventeenth-century Phugdrag, but it may be doubted that it was actually known.

Only about one century, possibly less, has elapsed between this Tibetan translation of the *Abhidhānottara* and the production of the Matho manuscripts, and it can be expected—though not taken for granted—that these manuscripts preserve a version rather close to the original translation. Tracing the genesis of the Mustang group Tantra sections could profit from some information as to where this translation was made. Could it be of Western Tibetan (Tholing?) origin, which might account for the fact that it is preserved only in Western Tibet but nowhere else? This question can be answered, if it can be answered at all, only if and when some notes on this topic are discovered in historiographical literature. More thorough research than what is possible within the framework of this paper is required here.

Geographical proximity might suggest a direct relation between Matho and Basgo, but there lie some 500 years between the productions of the respective manuscripts, and there are obviously intermediate stations and detours on the

54 See, e.g., the *Ḍākinīvajrapañjaratantrarājakaḷpa* (rKTs and D 419).

journey of this textual version down the river Indus. The lines along which this journey took place and its intermediate stations are still to be identified. Equally, the routes on which the corrupted Basgo version reached Sakya and Tsarang—provided it is a fact that the Early Mustang version was taken from Sakya and that Tsarang is a copy of it—remain an open question.

As already stated, a text-critical analysis of any individual text is, for obvious reasons, only of limited significance for the entire collection. It can merely point to the direction in which further investigation of other texts might have to embark. Accordingly, no ground-breaking results can be expected from the analysis of the Tibetan translations of the *Abhidhānottaratantra* with regard to our overall issue, i.e., the genesis and development of the Mustang group Kanjurs and their Tantra sections. A minimal general result, however, is the confirmation of what has already been known, or at least suspected, from previous random observation: the existence of a Western Tibetan tradition—distinct from the mainstream line of transmission—represented by the Phugdrag and Mustang group Kanjurs.

On the whole, this Western Tibetan tradition constitutes the older line, but this does not imply that the version of any particular text it contains is necessarily the older one. However, this tradition is by no means homogeneous. Phugdrag, apparently compiled from different canonical collections of different origins, occupies its very own position within the family of Kanjurs and has to be treated separately, but the Kanjurs of the Mustang group also show different agreements and disagreements among themselves to various degrees. Possible relations between them remain to be traced in further investigations.

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Sigla and Abbreviations

Canonical Collections

D	Derge	L	London	Ts	Tsarang
Do	Dolpo	Ma	Matho	Ty	Tashiyangtse Dzong
EM	Early Mustang Kanjur	Q	Peking	V	Ulaanbaatar
F	Phugdrag	S	Stog	X	Basgo
H	Lhasa	T	Tokyo	Z	Shey
J	Lithang				

Other

AUT	<i>Abhidhānottaratantra</i>	
BDRC	Buddhist Digital Resource Center	
<i>Blue Annals</i>	<i>Deb ther sngon po</i> by 'Gos lo tsA ba Gzhon nu dpal	see Roerich 1979
BuCh	Bu ston's <i>Chos 'byung</i>	see Nishioka 1980–1983
BuT	Bu ston's Tantra Catalogue	see Eimer 1989
IATS	International Association for Tibetan Studies	
rKTs	Resources for Kanjur and Tanjur Studies	
TMPV	Tibetan Manuscript Project Vienna	

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