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Natalia Yampolskaya

# Jadamba

Eight Mongolian Translations  
of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra

Harrassowitz  
Verlag



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## Preface

*Jadamba*—this is the name under which the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* is widely known in Mongolia. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, or the *sūtra* of Eight Thousand (Mong. *naiman mingyatu sudur*) is one of those Buddhist texts, on a par with the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*, *Pañcarakṣā* and others, that enjoy a special status in Mongolian culture. Apart from its role in liturgy, it is associated with popular ritual and revered as a powerful symbol. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is spread in Mongolia in numerous copies, the bulk of which, as one would find while browsing through library collections, shelves of antique shops and private households, contain the Tibetan translation of the text. Hence the established name *Jadamba*, which is a phonetic rendering of the Tibetan *brgyad stong pa*—“Eight Thousand.”

The prevalence of the Tibetan version of the *sūtra* is a common phenomenon in Mongolia where Tibetan has long been the principal language of Buddhist texts and ritual. However, it does not depreciate the significance of the Mongolian translations. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* was translated into Mongolian multiple times. At present eight Mongolian translations are described and one Oirat translation is published, and it is possible that there were others that have not come to be known today.

The present publication introduces eight Mongolian translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. I started researching this subject in 2010 within the context of my Ph. D. project at Bern University, Switzerland. At that point the Mongolian translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* had never become the object of scholars’ attention. A three year research resulted in identifying eight different translations all of which date back to the period from the early 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Oirat translation could not be accessed at that time and was not included in the study. A fragmentary comparative analysis of the eight translations was carried out in order to show how a sacred canonical text was handled by the Mongolian translators of the period.<sup>1</sup> The rich textual material provided for the fruitfulness of the study, the results of which allow to make observations on the translators’ methods of work and give grounds for speculations on their understanding of the process and aims of translation. The analysis of the religious and philosophical content of the *sūtra* is not pursued in this work.

The results of the study are presented in this book as three blocks: the extra-textual data on the eight translations (based on the colophons), the comparative analysis of the texts’ structure, vocabulary and style followed by conclusions and observations in a broader context, and the textual material in the form of comparative tables, which shows the overall structure of the translations, the text of one chapter and a selection of vocabulary. The last block can be used by the reader not only as an illustration to the analytical part of the study,

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1 The study was conducted as part of the interdisciplinary project “Text und Normativität” that focused in particular on redefining the concept of canon and canonicity. The project was based at the universities of Luzern and Bern and sponsored by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

but also as a convenient source of comparative textual material that can serve as reference for students of the language of Mongolian translated Buddhist literature.

One major drawback of my work is the limited range of comparative material in other languages. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* was translated into Mongolian from Tibetan, and the Tibetan text of the *sūtra* is addressed consistently. However, a comprehensive study of all the Tibetan versions has not been carried out, and this is probably the reason why some of the questions that present themselves in the course of the analysis remain unanswered. The same can be said of the Chinese translations that are not addressed here at all. This book is but the first step in the study of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* in Mongolia, and I hope that it will become the basis for future research that will fill these lacunae.

Altogether, the aim of the book is to introduce the translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* as part of the literary process in 17<sup>th</sup> century Mongolia.

Natalia Yampolskaya  
St. Petersburg, 2018

# Technical Notes

## Abbreviations

Mongolian translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*:

<i>A</i>	Anonymous translation
<i>AD</i>	translation by <i>Āryadeva</i>
<i>AG</i>	translation by <i>Altan Gerel ubasi</i>
<i>JP</i>	translation by <i>Ĵay-a paṇḍita</i>
<i>PDL</i>	translation by <i>Paṇḍita Darqan Blam-a</i>
<i>SS</i>	translation by <i>Samdan Sengge</i>
<i>DP</i>	translation by <i>Darba paṇḍita</i>
<i>TT</i>	translation by the <i>Diduḃba gabču lam-a, Durqar Omboo Sṅagbo bayṣi</i> and <i>Brasi bayṣi</i> (the Three Translators)

## Mongolian Sources:

<i>A-I99Xyl</i>	Xylograph I99 from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg: A. G. Sazykin, <i>Katalog mongol'skikh rukopisey i ksilografov Instituta vos-tokovedeniya Rossiyskoy Akademii nauk. Tom II</i> (Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura RAN 2001), № 2637. Anonymous translation.
<i>A-Kangxi</i>	Volume 46 from the blockprint edition of the Mongolian Kanjur of 1720, reprinted in Lokesh Chandra (Ed.), <i>Mongolian Kanjur</i> , vol. 46 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1977); Anonymous translation.
<i>ADMs</i>	Manuscript XT-7 from the collection of the museum of Ts. Damdinsuren, Ulaanbaatar: G. Bilguudei, <i>Ts. Damdinsurengiyn ger muzeyn mongol nomyn burtgel, bot' I</i> (Ulaanbaatar, 1998), № 450. Translation by <i>Āryadeva</i> .
<i>AG-UBMs</i>	Manuscript from a private collection, translation by Altan Gerel ubasi.
<i>JPMs</i>	Manuscript Q1 from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg: A. G. Sazykin, <i>Katalog mongol'skikh rukopisey i ksilografov Instituta vos-tokovedeniya Rossiyskoy Akademii nauk. Tom II</i> (Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura RAN 2001), № 2639. Translation by <i>Ĵay-a paṇḍita</i> .
<i>PDMs</i>	Xylograph Q223 from the collection of the Institute of Oriental

- Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg: A. G. Sazykin, Katalog mongol'skikh rukopisey i ksilografov Instituta vostokovedeniya Rossiyskoy Akademii nauk. Tom II (Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura RAN 2001), № 2641. Translation by *Paṇḍita Darqan Blam-a*.
- SS-SPMs* Volume 45 of the manuscript Kanjur from the collection of St. Petersburg State University: Z. K. Kas'yanenko, Katalog peterburgskogo rukopisnogo "Gandzhura" (Moskva, 1993): № 543. Translation by *Samdan Sengge*.
- SS-UUMs* Volume 45 of the manuscript Kanjur from the collection of the Siberian Department of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ulan-Ude. Translation by *Samdan Sengge*.
- TPMs* Manuscript from a private collection, translation by *Darba paṇḍita*.
- TTMs* A two-volume manuscript from the collection of the Royal Library, Copenhagen: Walther Heissig, Charles Bawden, Catalogue of Mongol Books, Manuscripts and Xylographs (Copenhagen: The Royal Library, 1971), Mong.481, 482. Translation by *Diduyba gabču lam-a*, *Durqar Omboo Sñagbo bayši* and *Brasi bayši*.

### Tibetan Sources:

- sDe dge* Volume 33 of the sDe dge par phud Kanjur edition: TBRC W30532, <<http://tbrc.org/#!/rid=W30532>> (last accessed 01.08.2017).
- PK* Volume 46 of the Beijing (Peking) Kanjur edition: TBRC W4CZ5370, <<https://www.tbrc.org/#!/rid=W4CZ5370>>
- sTogMs* Volume 50 from the sTog pho brang manuscript Kanjur edition. TBRC W22083, <<http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O01CT0007|O01CT000701>> (last accessed 01.08.2017).

### Catalogues:

- Chinese Collection* Catalogue of Ancient Mongolian Books and Documents of China, vol. 1 (Beijing Library Press, 1999).
- Damdinsuren* G. Bilguudei, Ts. Damdinsurengiin ger muzeyn mongol nomyn burtgel, bot' I (Ulaanbaatar, 1998).
- Kas'yanenko* Zoya K. Kas'yanenko, Katalog peterburgskogo rukopisnogo "Gandzhura" (Moskva, 1993).
- Ligeti* Lajos Ligeti, Catalogue du Kanjur mongol imprimé (Budapest: Société Kőrösi Csoma, 1942).
- Royal Library* Walther Heissig and Charles Bawden, Catalogue of Mongol Books, Manuscripts and Xylographs (Copenhagen: The Royal Library, 1971).

- Sazykin* Aleksey G. Sazykin, Katalog mongol'skikh rukopisey i ksilograficheskikh izdaniy Instituta vostokovedeniya Rossiyskoy Akademii nauk. Tom II (Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura RAN, 2001).
- Toyo Bunko* Nicholas Poppe, Leon Hurvitz and Hidehiro Okada, Catalogue of the Manchu-Mongol Section of the Toyo Bunko (The Toyo Bunko & the University of Washington Press, 1964).

## Transliteration and Transcription

Foreign words and names that occur in the text will be italicised and given in the transliteration/transcription of the language they come from. Tibetan transliteration will be given in the extended Wylie transliteration system.<sup>1</sup> When Tibetan names occur in the text, the root letter of the initial syllable will be capitalised.

Mongolian names and titles of Tibetan and Sanskrit origin that do not have a unified spelling will be given in their Sanskrit or Tibetan form (e. g. *paṇḍita*). If necessary, spelling variations will be listed in a footnote on the first occurrence. In the absence of a universally accepted standard of transcription, Mongolian words of ambiguous spelling will be transcribed according to the word-index to the chronicle *Erdeni-yin tobči*, compiled by Igor de Rachewilz.<sup>2</sup>

## Tibetan and Sanskrit Sources

The genuine Tibetan sources that were used by the Mongolian translators of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* are not known. While a comprehensive research into the Tibetan versions of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* could not be conducted in the course of my study, a fragmentary comparison of the different Kanjur editions of the *sūtra* that were available (*Yongle*, '*Jang sa tham, sDe dge, Urga, Co ne, lHa sa, sNar thang, sTog pho brang bris ma*') did not reveal significant differences between them. The Tibetan Beijing (Peking) Kanjur edition of 1700 was chosen to be used as a conventional text source for comparative analysis. Potentially, this edition could be used by one translator (Anonymous), and the comparative study presented in this publication does not implicate that the relations between this Tibetan text and the Mongolian sources are direct. However, in the absence of the relevant sources, the Beijing edition successfully serves as a conventional model for comparative analysis.

This study contains few instances of referring to the Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, which is only quoted for illustrative purposes. In all these cases the text is cited from the

- 1 Turrell Wylie, "A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 22 (1959): 261–67; Nathaniel Garson and David Germano, "Extended Wylie Transliteration Scheme," *Tibetan & Himalayan Digital Library*, <<http://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/#!essay=/thl/ewts>> (last accessed 18.03.2018).
- 2 Igor de Rachewilz, John R. Krueger, *Sayang Secen. Erdeni-yin Tobci ('Precious Summary'): a Mongolian Chronicle of 1662 II. Word-Index to the Urga text prepared by I. de Rachewilz and J. R. Krueger* (Faculty of Asian Studies: the Australian National University, 1991).

website *Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon*—a text database of the University of the West, USA: <<http://www.dsbcproject.org/canon-text/book/68>> (last accessed 20.01.2017).

## Appendices

This publication contains three appendices that can be used as reference information on the text sources and will be addressed in the chapters. Appendix 1 is a comparative table that illustrates the structure of seven Mongolian translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (analysed in Chapter II, Part I). The table in Appendix 2 contains the text of Chapter 32 of the *sūtra* in eight Mongolian translations (analysed in Chapter II, Part I). In Appendices 1 and 2 the Mongolian texts are presented against the Tibetan text of *PK*. Appendix 3 is a comparative table that contains a selection of 133 terms, given as found in the eight Mongolian translations against the Tibetan and Sanskrit variants (analysed in Chapter II, Part II).

Additional material—Appendix 4—is published online on the website of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences. It can be accessed by following this link [www.orientalstudies.ru/rus/images/pdf/add1/b\\_yampolskaya\\_2018\\_appendix\\_4.pdf](http://www.orientalstudies.ru/rus/images/pdf/add1/b_yampolskaya_2018_appendix_4.pdf), or found on the author's personal page ([www.orientalstudies.ru/eng/](http://www.orientalstudies.ru/eng/) → Personalia → Yampolskaya Natalia Vasilyevna → Publications). Appendix 4 contains the text of Chapter 30 of the *sūtra* in seven Mongolian translations. It is seldom referred to in this study, and is meant to serve as reference material that makes a large body of text accessible. Chapter 30, which contains the beginning of the story of *bodhisattva Sadāprarūdita*, was considered suitable for this purpose based on its diverse content.

## Legend

(...)	text torn out or erased
[1]	page number
/	end of line
...	transliteration/transcription starts or ends in the middle of the sentence
<ene>	text written in as correction
{ene}	text crossed out as correction
>ene<	restored text
<u>ene</u>	word spelled incorrectly or against classic rules

## Mongolian ᠠᠯᠢᠢ signs

'	᠊	ê	ᠡ	m̐	ᠮ	P	ᠮ	ᠳ, t	ᠳ	z	ᠵ
c	ᠴ	h	ᠬ	ᠨ	ᠨ	PH	ᠬ	k, ḡ	ᠬ		
ç	ᠴ	ḥ	ᠬ	ñ	ᠨ	ş	ᠶ	p	ᠮ		
ḍ	ᠳ	j	ᠵ	ô	ᠳ	ṭ	ᠳ	v	ᠳ		





# Introduction

## A Canonical Text

The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* is a *Mahāyāna sūtra* that dates back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Its name is often translated into English after Edward Conze as “The Perfection<sup>1</sup> of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines.”<sup>2</sup> The *sūtra* and its verse analogue, the *Ratnagūṇasamcayagāthā*, are considered to be the earliest texts of the *Prajñāpāramitā* cycle which includes several dozens of other *sūtras* that emerged in India in the period between the 1st and 7th centuries. Among these texts, classified according to their length, are the *Śatasāhasrikā* (100,000 lines, the longest of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* which in the Tibeto-Mongolian tradition takes up twelve volumes), the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* (25,000 lines), the *Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā* (18,000 lines), the *Daśasāhasrikā* (10,000 lines), the *Sārdhadvisāhasrikā* (2,500 lines), the *Saptaśatikā* (700 lines), the *Triśatikā*, widely known as *Vajracchedikā*, or the “Diamond *sūtra*” (300 lines), the *Adhyardhaśatikā* (150 lines), the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*—the “Heart *sūtra*” (25 lines) and the shortest one—*Ekākṣarā*, the *Prajñāpāramitā* in a single letter. These texts expound on the central concept of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism—*prajñāpāramitā*, understood as the ability of seeing the true nature of things as emptiness (Skr. *śūnyatā*).

A groundbreaking contribution to the study of *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* in the West was made by Edward Conze who dedicated his life’s work to the study and translation of these texts. His translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* from Sanskrit made the *sūtra* accessible to the English-speaking reader.<sup>3</sup> As my research into the Mongolian translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is limited to the fields of textology and translation studies and does not attempt to deal

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1 Perfection refers to the Sanskrit *pāramitā* (literally “gone to the other side”), a term used in Buddhism to refer to one of the six (or ten, depending on the tradition) actions (or virtues) the practice of which leads to enlightenment. The six *pāramitās* according to the *Mahāyāna* tradition are generosity (Skr. *dāna*), discipline (Skr. *śīla*), patience (Skr. *kṣānti*), diligence (Skr. *vīrya*), concentration (Skr. *dhyāna*) and wisdom (Skr. *prajñā*).

2 Line refers to *śloka*—a 32-syllable line in Sanskrit poetry.

3 Edward Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary* (Four Seasons Foundation: Bolinas, California, 1975). Among Conze’s works dedicated to a number of *Prajñāpāramitā* texts the following two can be noted as describing this literature in general: Edward Conze, *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature* (The Reiyukai Library, Bibliographia Philologica Buddhica, Series Maior: Tokyo, the Reiyukai, 1978); Edward Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies. Selected Essays* (Bruno Cassirer Publishers LTD, 31 Portland Road, Oxford, 1967). The first fragmentary translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* was carried out by Eugène Burnouf and published in: Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction à l’histoire du Bouddhisme indien* (Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1844). A significant contribution into the study of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature was made by Étienne Lamotte who published an annotated translation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Upadeśa*, a text attributed to Nagarjuna: Étienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)* (Vols. I–V, Louvain: Bureaux de Muséon, 1944–1980).

with the religious-philosophical aspect of the text, in this publication I largely rely on Conze's interpretation of the *sūtra*.

The earliest versions of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* go back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE and are in fact the oldest extant specimens of a *Mahāyāna sūtra*. The text was put together when the *Mahāyāna* tradition was just emerging, and marked a pivotal stage in the history of Buddhism—the shift from oral transmission to written texts. For a long time its early versions were preserved only in the oldest of the seven Chinese translations, primarily the one by *Lokakṣema* (179 CE).<sup>4</sup> Based on the chronology of these texts Edward Conze suggested that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* was composed in Sanskrit in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.<sup>5</sup> An important discovery was made in 1999 when fragments of a *Gāndhāri* version of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, dated to the period between 47 and 147 CE, were found in Northern Pakistan. Based on the study of these fragments Seishi Karashima has proposed a hypothesis according to which the text of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* took shape in Northern India, and its original language was possibly *Gāndhāri*.<sup>6</sup>

The Mongolian and Tibetan translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* are close to the later Sanskrit versions preserved in 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts. The *sūtra* was first translated into Tibetan in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by the Indian *paṇḍita*s *Śākyasena* and *Jñānasiddhi*, and the translator *Dharmatāśīla*. In the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries this translation was re-worked and edited multiple times by four outstanding Buddhist scholars—*Rin chen bZang po*, *Atīṣa*, *'Brom ston pa* and *bLo ldan Shes rab*.

The earliest of the eight Mongolian translations known today dates back to the very beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and no evidence of the existence of earlier ones has been found. Listed chronologically (to the extent possible, as not all of them could be accurately dated), the Mongolian translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* are:

1. The translation by *Diduyba gabču lam-a*, *Durqar Omboo Sñagbo bayši* and *Brasi bayši* (hereafter referred to as the Three Translators), 1599–1603.
2. The Translation by *Santasiri dai guusi Āryadeva* (1608).
3. The translation by *Samdan Sengge* (the 1620s).
4. The translation by *Paṇḍita Darqan Blam-a* (date unknown).
5. The translation by *Altan Gerel ubasi* (mid 17<sup>th</sup> century).
6. The translation by *Jāy-a paṇḍita Nam mkha'i rGya mtsho* (1638–1662).
7. The translation by *Darba paṇḍita bLo bzang bZod pa rGya mtsho* (1678–1702).
8. The Anonymous Translation (before 1720).

The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is part of the Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist canon Kanjur, and the chronology of its eight translations covers the same period as the history of the Kanjur in Mongolia. It begins in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when the first impulses to produce a Mongo-

4 For a description of the Chinese translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, with a focus on the significance of the three early ones, see: Lewis R. Lancaster, "The Oldest Mahāyāna Sūtra: Its Significance for the Study of Buddhist Development," *The Eastern Buddhist. New Series*. Vol. VIII, № I (May 1975), 30–41.

5 Edward Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary* (Four Seasons Foundation: Bolinas, California, 1975), xi.

6 Seishi Karashima, "Was the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* compiled in Gandhāra in Gāndhārī?," *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2012*, Vol. XVI (March 2013), 171–188.

lian Kanjur first took place, and ends with the creation of the ultimate Beijing blockprint Kanjur edition of 1720. The Mongolian translations of the *sūtra* reflect the development of Buddhist translation practice in this period, as well as the development of the canonisation process. In this publication I aim to show that the canonical status of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is not insignificant when it comes to researching the diversity of its Mongolian translations. I view both the variety and the peculiar language of its translations as the result of the specific reception of Buddhist scriptures in the Mongolian literary culture.

The name Kanjur (in the mongolised version—*Ganjuur*) is a phonetic reproduction of the Tibetan *bKa' 'gyur*, which literally means “Translation of the Word,” i. e. of the Buddha’s teachings. The presence of the word “translation” in this very name is emblematic: it reveals the somewhat critical understanding of the nature of the collection, as a translation is something that can be edited, revised and corrected. The complicated history of the Kanjur in Tibet fully reflects this concept.

The Kanjur is a large and diverse collection of texts (99–109 volumes in most Tibetan versions, 108 or 113 in Mongolian; different editions include a total of 1,169 texts<sup>7</sup>) that were translated into Tibetan (mostly from Sanskrit, in rare cases—Chinese) starting from the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century catalogues (Tib. *dkar chag*) that listed the Tibetan translations were created as the first attempts to systematise these texts,<sup>8</sup> while the first Kanjur collection is believed to have been compiled in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century (the Old *sNar thang* Kanjur of 1310).<sup>9</sup> The Kanjur did not include all the translated Buddhist texts, but only those that were considered to have been uttered by the Buddha himself.<sup>10</sup> The following history of the Kanjur in Tibet is a history of multiple editions, no two of which are known to be identical: the collection was never strictly closed, and no single standard edition came to exist.<sup>11</sup> In 1995 Peter Skilling suggested to rethink the accuracy of referring to the Kanjur as canon and use this term in plural:

7 A comprehensive overview of the different Kanjur editions, with information on the number of volumes and texts, is given in: Stanley, D. Phillip, “The Tibetan Buddhist Canon: The Kangyur (Bka' 'gyur) and Tengyur (Bstan 'gyur),” *Tibetan & Himalayan Digital Library*, <<http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/index.php#!essay=/stanley/tibcanons/s/b1/>> (last accessed December 21, 2016).

8 The history of the Tibetan Kanjur, including the early translations and catalogues, is described in the following works: Helmut Eimer, “The Tibetan Kanjur Printed in China,” *Zentralasiatische Studien des Seminars für Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft Zentralasiens der Universität Bonn* 36 (International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies: Halle, 2007), 35–56; Peter Skilling, “From bKa' bstan bcos to Kanjur and bStan 'gyur,” in *Transmission of the Tibetan Canon. Papers Presented at a Panel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the IATS, Graz 1995*, ed. Helmut Eimer (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften), 87–107; Kurtis R. Shaeffer, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 12–18.

9 Helmut Eimer, “On the Structure of the Tibetan Kanjur,” in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism (PIATS 2000. Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies)*, ed. Helmut Eimer and David Germano (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 63.

10 The Tanjur (Tib. *bsTan 'gyur*—“Translated Treatises”) is a 224-volume collection of commentaries to the *sūtras* and *tantras* of the Kanjur. It is the second part of the canon, but the works contained in it are not ascribed to the Buddha. The criteria for recognising a text as the genuine Word of the Buddha will be discussed in more detail in the following parts of this Introduction.

11 Peter Skilling, “From bKa' bstan bcos to Kanjur and bStan 'gyur,” 101.

In the absence of a normative or standard collection, it is inaccurate to speak of a “canon”—of *the* Kanjur or *the* Tanjur—or to speak of a “recension” or “edition” of *the* Kanjur. We may speak of Kanjurs, or a recension or edition of a specific text within a Kanjur...<sup>12</sup>

The history of the Kanjur in Mongolia is much shorter and lacks such complex diversity, yet it is governed by similar principles. Starting from the 13<sup>th</sup> century selected Buddhist texts were translated into the Mongolian language unsystematically, for the most part from Tibetan (in rare cases—Chinese and other languages of Central Asia). After the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368 this process slowed down for two centuries and gained new momentum after 1578, when *Altan qayan*’s alliance with the Dalai Lama brought about a more centralised scripture translation activity. The first precedent of producing the whole Kanjur collection in the Mongolian language occurred in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to the biography of *Altan qayan*, *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur*, a group of translators worked on the project from 1602 to 1607 by the request of *Altan qayan*’s grandson *Namudai sečen qayan*. This momentous event is also mentioned in the colophon of the *Daśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* translated by *Siregetü güüsi čorji*, as was noted by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz.<sup>13</sup> Regretfully, not a single copy of this Kanjur translation has reached our days, although it is probable that it was partly integrated into the later one.

The earliest extant edition of the Mongolian Kanjur was prepared in 1628–29 under the patronage of *Liγdan qayan*. It has been established that the redaction committee largely used older translations changing the colophons in favour of their patron, which explains the promptness of their work.<sup>14</sup> Few copies of this manuscript edition exist today, and only one of them is complete.<sup>15</sup> Although in Mongolian studies the manuscript Kanjurs are tradi-

12 Ibid., 104.

13 Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, “The Transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur: A preliminary Report,” in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism (PIATS 2000. Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies)*, ed. Helmut Eimer and David Germano (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 156–59.

14 Walther Heissig, “Beiträge zur Übersetzungsgeschichte des mongolischen buddhistischen Kanons,” *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Dritte Folge*, Nr. 50 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 5–42; Walther Heissig, “Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der mongolischen Kanjur-Redaktion der Ligdan Khan-Zeit (1628–1629),” *Studia Altaica* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1957), 71–87; Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, “The Transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur...,” 151.

15 The complete 113-volume copy of *Liγdan qayan*’s Kanjur that dates back to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is preserved in Saint-Petersburg State University Library and was catalogued by Zoya Kas’yanenko (See: *Kas’yanenko*). The collection of the Siberian Department of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Ulan-Ude holds 108 (or 109) volumes of a later copy (late 17<sup>th</sup>, possibly early 18<sup>th</sup> century). An almost complete 109-volume copy is kept at the Library of the Academy of Social Sciences of Inner Mongolia in Hohhot (although the appearance of these volumes suggests that they come from several different Kanjur copies that were mixed together). Another treasure of the Hohhot collection are the 20 volumes of the manuscript Kanjur written in gold on blue paper, considered to be the original copy written in 1928–29. The Mongolian National Library in Ulaanbaatar preserves 70 volumes, which, too, originate from a number of different manuscripts. One volume from the Tantra section (cha) is preserved at the Ethnographical Collection of the National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen (this volume used to be part of the Asian manuscript collection of the Royal Library, it was described in: Walther Heissig, “Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der mongolischen Kanjur-Redaktion der Ligdan Khan-Zeit (1628–

tionally referred to as one edition (the Kanjur of *Liydan qayan*), a comparative study performed in the recent years has shown that the different copies are not identical: while the overall structure and content of all the examined copies coincide, the earliest of them (the Golden Kanjur manuscript preserved in Hohhot) contains a different translation of the *Pañcarakṣā*.<sup>16</sup> Taking into account other minor differences and the fact that only 20 volumes of the Golden Kanjur are accessible today, the possibility of there being other dissimilarities cannot be ruled out.

A century later, in 1720, a xylographic Kanjur edition in the Mongolian language was put together in Beijing under the auspices of the emperor *Kāngxī*.<sup>17</sup> This edition is notably different from the Kanjur of *Liydan qayan* and is believed to have been modelled after the Beijing edition of the Tibetan Kanjur of 1684–1692 (possibly, 1700).<sup>18</sup> The differences between the manuscript and blockprint editions include content, the order of texts and the choice of the Mongolian translations. For instance, the edition of 1628–29 includes the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* translated by *Samdan Sengge*, while in the edition of 1720 it was replaced by a new translation (Anonymous), which, as will be shown in Chapter 2 of this book, can be explained by the non-conformity of the earlier translation with the Tibetan text in the Beijing Tibetan Kanjur edition. However, a more detailed analysis of the Anonymous translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* compared to several Tibetan ones shows that the Beijing edition of the Tibetan Kanjur was probably not the only source used to edit the Mongolian Kanjur of 1720. This is but one of the many observations that demonstrate the inefficiency of facile generalisations when it comes to defining such a complex collection as the Mongolian Kanjur. While research in this area has been progressing for the last decades, crucial aspects of the history of Kanjur transmission in Mongolia still remain unknown.<sup>19</sup> There is no data on the Tibetan editions that were used when compiling the Mongolian Kanjur in the

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1629),” *Studia Altaica* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1957), 71–87; *Royal Library*, 199–204; Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, “The Transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur...,” 162–165). Finally, fragments (1288 isolated folios) of three Kanjur manuscripts (one “golden” and two “plain” ones) are preserved at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg and a number of European libraries (Berlin, Wolfenbüttel, Halle, Kassel, Linköping). A comprehensive overview of the current state of research was given by Kirill Alekseev. See: Kirill Alekseev, “Mongolskiy Gandzhur: genezis i struktura,” *Strany i narody Vostoka* (Moskva: Nauka–Vostochnaya literatura, 2015), 201–9.

16 This and other differences are described in Kirill Alekseev, “Mongolskiy Gandzhur...,” 209–12. For a more detailed account of the Golden Kanjur see: Kirill Alekseev and Anna Turanskaya, “An overview of the *Altan Kanjur* kept at the Library of the Academy of Social Sciences of Inner Mongolia,” *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques*, LXVII (3), 755–782.

17 The blockprint Kanjur is described in the catalogue by Lajos Ligeti (See: *Ligeti*) and was published as part of the collection of Professor Raghuvira in the *Śāta-piṭaka* series: Lokesh Chandra (Ed.), *Mongolian Kanjur*. Vols. 1–108 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1973–79).

18 Vladimir L. Uspensky, “The Tibetan Equivalents to the Titles of the Texts in the St. Petersburg Manuscript of Mongolian Kanjur: a Reconstructed Catalogue,” in *Transmission of the Tibetan Canon. Papers Presented at a Panel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the IATS, Graz 1995*, ed. Helmut Eimer (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 114; Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, “The Transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur...,” 155.

19 The history of the transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur is described in the work of Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, “The Transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur...,” 151–76. In 2015 Kirill Alekseev published an article based on a comparative study of a larger circle of sources (Mongolian Kanjur manuscripts that had not been thoroughly examined before): Kirill Alekseev, “Mongolskiy Gandzhur...,” 190–228.

early 17<sup>th</sup> century, nothing explains the peculiarities of the structure and content of the Mongolian Kanjur, etc. The differences between its existing copies suggest that the process of work on the creation and transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur was non-linear and complex, similar in nature to the Tibetan model.

The term *canon* has been repeatedly described as debatable and easy to misuse in the field of culture and religion studies. The attempts to redefine and specify the concept were caused by the inaccurate universalisation of the common Western understanding of *canon* as a fixed sacred scripture, a holy book, and consecutive perceiving of *canon* and *scripture* as synonyms. In fact the emphasis on *canon* as a concept does not occur universally. For example, neither Buddhism nor Hinduism, two traditions that possess extensive collections of sacred texts, have independently produced theories concerning this phenomenon.<sup>20</sup>

When describing the manifestations of canonicity in practice, one aspect is of central significance—the duality of the ideal and the formal (the Norm itself as opposed to the written text containing this Norm). The pattern of transition of the ideal into the formal—the shift from the primary level of sacred knowledge to the secondary level of a book containing this knowledge—is the key to understanding certain paradoxical nuances of how canonical texts function.<sup>21</sup> The history of most religions shows that the Norm is the first to originate and can exist for lengthy periods of time before it is enclosed into the boundaries of a canonical text. The forthcoming of such texts is by no means accidental. It can be set in a framework of various preconditions, be those political, economical or social, that present a threat to the religion in question or call elsewhere for a manifestation of its validity. This is when the text comes into play acting as a token of recognition of the doctrine it represents. It can be used intentionally by political and religious institutions or figures in the struggle for power and authority (J. Z. Smith calls the process of canon formation “essentially political”<sup>22</sup>). This was the case in 1628–29, when the Mongolian manuscript Kanjur was created by the order of *Liγdan qayan*. The jade seal of the Yuan, the golden statue of *Mahākāla*

20 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A comparative Approach* (London, 1993), 63, 215.

21 The understanding of *canon* as a written law took time to shape. At the dawn of Christianity the concept was rather loose, which is emphasised in the following passage by Giorgio Agamben: “Anyone familiar with the history of the monastic orders knows that, at least in regard to the first centuries, it is difficult to understand the status of what the documents call *regula*. In the most ancient testimonies, *regula* simply means *conversatio fratrum*, the monks’ way of life in a given monastery. It is often identified with the founder’s way of living envisaged as *forma vitae*—that is, as an example to be followed. And the founder’s life is in turn the sequel to the life of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels. With the gradual development of the monastic orders, and the Roman Curia’s growing need to exercise control over them, the term *regula* increasingly assumed the meaning of a written text, preserved in the monastery, which had to be read by the person who, having embraced the monastic life, consented to subject himself to the prescriptions and prohibitions contained therein. However, at least until Saint Benedict, the rule does not indicate a general norm but the living community (*koinos bios, cenobio*) that results from an example and in which the life of each monk tends at the limit to become paradigmatic—that is, to constitute itself as *forma vitae*. See: Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things* (Zone Books: New York, 2009), 21–22.

22 Jonathan Z. Smith, “Canons, Catalogues and Classics,” in *Canonization and Decanonization. Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), held at Leiden 9–10 January 1997*, ed. Arie Van der Kooij and Karel van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 299.

and the Kanjur written in gold were the Three Jewels that symbolised the legitimacy of the power of the last Great *qayan* of the Mongols.<sup>23</sup>

A canonised normative text guarantees the fixation of a general line as opposed to a possible diversity of aberrations from the Norm, and apotheosises certain texts thus distinguishing them from the bigger field of allied literature. Once fixed and recognised within a certain community of followers, the norms become a canon and are henceforth invariable and unquestionable. However, what modern scholarship often calls a canon in traditions as diverse as the Jain, Confucian or Buddhist, would not be recognised uniformly inside these traditions as the body of scripture analogous to the biblical canon (or not until relatively recent times, and then often under the influence of Western scholarly conventions). Robert Van Voorst associates *canon* (as “a list or collection of books recognised as scriptural”) with the “degree of closure,” suggesting that the scriptural collections of certain religions (Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, etc.) remain open for two key reasons—the multiplicity of sacred texts and the possibility of producing new scriptures.<sup>24</sup> If defined as a fixed and officially recognised authoritative text, the phenomenon of canon cannot be found in a number of major religious traditions. Yet these traditions do possess scriptures that ask to be compared with that of canon of the Judaeo-Christian model.<sup>25</sup>

In this light the possibility of using the term *canon* in reference to the Mongolian Kanjur can be accepted. Since the production of the Beijing xylographic edition of 1720 no new ones have been produced, which allows to speak of closure and view the earlier manuscript editions as products of the canonisation process.<sup>26</sup> In my work I use two terms—*canon* and *scripture*—to refer to the same texts from two different points of view. *Canon* is understood here as an authoritative text, or collection of texts, of an institutionally recognised status in a particular tradition. *Scripture* is a sacred text of superhuman nature, origin and qualities (like *buddhavacana* in Buddhism). In other words, the term *scripture* is used to stress the

23 See, for example: Kirill Alekseev and Anna Turanskaya, “An overview of the *Altan Kanjur* kept at the Library of the Academy of Social Sciences of Inner Mongolia,” *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques*, LXVII (3), 759.

24 Robert E. Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures* (Wadsworth:Thomson, 2007), 8.

25 Canonicity is a useful category when it comes to describing scriptural traditions, and it can be successfully employed. So, in his article “The Mastery of Speech: Canonicity and Control in the Vedas” David Carpenter shows how “the utilisation of canon as an interpretative category in the study of the religions of South Asia” can be very promising, provided the precise meaning of the term is reconsidered based on the specifics of the material. See: David Carpenter, “The Mastery of Speech: Canonicity and Control in the Vedas,” in *Authority, Anxiety and Canon. Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, ed. Laurie L. Patton (State University of New York Press, 1994), 19–20.

26 What Mongolian Kanjur study lacks is an anthropological insight into the perception of its subject by different groups of the Mongolian society both in the past and today. While Western scholars search for the access to the earlier, more archaic copies of the Kanjur, the xylographic edition of 1720, which has been widely accessible through the *Śatapitaka* edition (*Mongolian Kanjur*, ed. Lokesh Chandra, Vols. 1–108 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1973–79) and the catalogue of Lajos Ligeti (see: *Ligeti*), is reprinted in China and published in Mongolia in the Cyrillic script (the publication started in 2011 by “Tsogt tsaigyn hurden” publishing company in Ulaanbataar). On the one hand, this casual observation suggests that the xylographic edition has fully adopted the function of a canon. On the other hand, the modern Cyrillic edition of the Mongolian Kanjur is prepared by a team of editors who check the text against Tibetan versions, which shows that the tradition of treating the translation of the Buddha’s word as something that can be reviewed and edited is still alive.



exceptional status of a text based on its content, form or origin, while the term *canon* accentuates its official recognition within a community (possibly, in a fixed form).

## The Buddhist Canon and Textual Authority

The reasons why the term *canon* has been named problematic when applied to collections of Buddhist sacred texts can be found in both the history of these texts and certain postulates of the Buddhist doctrine.

One specific, hard-set canonical collection of Buddhist texts is nowhere to be found. That is not only to say that the Buddhist canon has changed over and over in time and due to confessional variations, but also that its content is so vast and varied that it would be quite impossible to define what kinds of texts are to be included into the Buddhist canon based on any criteria other than those applied by every particular school. When the phrase *Buddhist canon* is used it refers to a number of different Buddhist canons.

In the whole variety of Buddhist canonical collections three scriptural corpora stand out as backbone models: the Pali *Tipiṭaka* (Skr. *Tripiṭaka*), the Tibetan Kanjur, and the Chinese Buddhist canon (Chin. *Dàzàngjīng*). These three canon-models are significantly different from each other and only they partly share content (some *sūtras* and sections of *Vinaya* are included in all the three traditions, though the texts are never completely identical). There is no agreement between different schools in what concerns recognition of texts as *buddhavacana* (the Word of the Buddha): the *Theravāda* tradition does not acknowledge most of the scriptures that were canonised in China and Tibet, while Tibetan tantras are not accepted by the Chinese, and their genuineness is even argued upon between the Buddhist schools of Tibet.<sup>27</sup>

The first texts known to have gained canonical status in Buddhism were those attributed to the historical Buddha *Śākyamuni*. Soon after the Buddha's death (around 400 BC) his disciples are believed to have gathered what is known as the First Buddhist Council in *Rājagṛha*, and recited their master's teachings.<sup>28</sup> This first impetus towards canonising these sermons was given by the natural necessity of preserving the words of the deceased master with all the possible accuracy. The texts were transmitted orally, and the closest disciples of the Buddha were to recite the sermons that they had memorised from their master's lips, while a council of 500 elders was to decide upon the authenticity of these

27 José I. Cabezón "Scripture," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Peter Harvey (Continuum: London and New York, 2004), 756.

28 There is no unanimity as to the date of the First Council, it is dated to the year of the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, which was widely believed to be either 486, or 368 BC See: Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism* (Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste Louvain-la-Neuve, 1988), 124. Today the existing versions of the chronology of the Buddha's life are subject to extensive criticism, which is reflected, for instance, in the following volume, dedicated entirely to this topic: *The Dating of the Historical Buddha. Die Datierung des Historischen Buddha*, Part I, ed. Heinz Bechert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991). The proceedings of the First Council have not been established as a historical fact and remain questionable to scholars. See: Charles S. Prebish, "Councils, Buddhist," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson Gale, 2004), 1817–8.

texts. So, not only were the distinguished reciters entrusted with the task to accurately reproduce the teachings, they were also responsible for selecting those texts that were to be regarded as canonical, which resulted in establishing a corpus of texts known as the “root recitation” (Skr. *mūlasaṃgīti*).<sup>29</sup> As different schools of reciters (Skr. *bhāṇaka*) at the time of oral transmission of scripture did not entirely agree on the status of all the texts, and all the schools of *Theravāda* later claimed their version of the canon to be the one accepted initially, there is ambiguity concerning even the results of this First Council.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the entire content of the *Tripitaka* cannot be regarded as corresponding to the one agreed upon at the *Rājagṛha* council, for it incorporates later works.<sup>31</sup> Étienne Lamotte suggested that there was no canon before the time of king *Aśoka* (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), but merely drafted texts that were later used as basis for the *Tripitakas*.<sup>32</sup>

The guidelines for assessing the authenticity of a religious teaching, traditionally believed to come from the Buddha himself, are known as the Four Great Authorities (Skr. *mahāpadeśa*). These four rules came about as a result of the emergence of controversial apocryphal texts and apprehension of forgery.<sup>33</sup> According to their requirements, a text can be ranked among the Words of the Buddha if it was heard from the Buddha (1), or a gathering of elders (Pali. *thera*) (2), a group of elder monks possessing knowledge of the *Sūtras*, *Vinaya* and *Abhidharma* (3), or a single learned monk expert in all the three collections of teachings (4). A teaching meeting these demands could only be recognised in case it did not contradict in any way the *Sūtras*, *Vinaya*, or the nature of things (Skr. *dharmatā*), i. e. the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination.<sup>34</sup>

The initial criterion of canonicity therefore was the genuine words of the historical Buddha, and the authenticity test was based on the testimony of an unquestionable authority. The more time passed since the demise of the Buddha, the less there was left to serve as first-hand authority, opening vast possibilities for interpretation, which consequently lead to authorisation of numerous new texts based on new doctrines.<sup>35</sup> The accounts found

29 Peter Skilling, “Redaction, recitation, and writing: Transmission of the Buddha’s teaching in India in the early period,” in *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober and Claudia Brown (Routledge, 2009), 55.

30 Kenneth R. Norman, *Pāli Literature* (Otto Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1983), 9, 31. The division into eighteen schools, as well as their disagreement concerning canonical texts, is briefly described in the work by Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy* (George Allen & Unwin: London, 1983), 119–120.

31 Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism* (Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste Louvain-la-Neuve, 1988), 129. The difficulties of studying the content of the Pali canon and the late origins of its existing copies are discussed in the work by Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began: the Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings* (The Athlone Press, 1996), 8–12. On the same topic see also Edward Conze, *Buddhism: a Short History* (Oneworld: Oxford 2008), 1–3.

32 Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 562.

33 Ulrich Pagel, “The Sacred Writings of Buddhism,” in *Buddhism*, ed. Peter Harvey (Continuum: London and New York, 2001), 31–2; Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 164.

34 Paul Harrison, “Canon,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson Gale, 2004), 111.

35 Furthermore, the texts that are known today as the genuine teachings of the historical Buddha by no means represent the whole bulk of material that was known by the time of the First Council. It was oral transmission that doomed the texts that did not pass the authenticity test to oblivion: if they were not memorised, they were not passed on, and eventually forgotten. Moreover, it is possible that the tra-

in the *Vinayas* of various schools share a common feature: they all allude to the tradition of the councils (i. e. a historical tradition) as validation of the antiquity and authenticity of their canonical collections. Apart from that, there are accounts (Lamotte names the *Avadāna* and the *Vinaya* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* school) that seem to appeal primarily to the uninterrupted transmission of the texts rather than to their genuineness (historicity) as such. The accounts of the first Buddhist councils prove to be numerous and contradictory,<sup>36</sup> it is not clear which of them correspond to historical facts, and yet the result of the processes that took place during the first few centuries after the Buddha's death was the establishment of a basic body of scripture known to be commonly accepted by the early Buddhist community.

Several centuries passed before the Buddha's teachings were first committed to writing by a group of monks that assembled in Sri Lanka for what is known as the Fourth Buddhist Council (1<sup>st</sup> century BC).<sup>37</sup> There is no evidence of the existence of a single universally accepted collection at that point. According to Peter Skilling, by the time the schools wrote their scriptures down, there probably was a variety of collections in different vernaculars, and certain texts could have been written down independently before a greater codification took place. The accounts of the procedure that took place in Sri Lanka are vague and might be regarded as questionable.<sup>38</sup>

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ditional accounts of the First Council give a biased interpretation of the facts, and there is no valid historical evidence to cast light on other possible aspects of this procedure (i. e. alternative opinions, presence of disagreeing members of the *Samgha*, etc.). Quoting Anthony K. Warder: "If there were a number of monks in distant parts who missed the First Rehearsal it is likely enough that quite a number of discourses remembered by them and handed down to their pupils existed, which were missed at the Rehearsal though perfectly authentic." (See: Anthony K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi, 1970), 205). Despite the early attempt to preserve the Buddha's teachings as they were, faction evolved already on the initial stages, the most demonstrable example being the disputable status of *Abhidharmapiṭaka* (See: Ibid., 202; Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 180). The ambiguity around the agreements made at the First Council suggests that no codification was carried out at that point. Ulrich Pagel considers the possibility of treating it as merely a gathering of scriptures, for a codification, had there been one, would have given a "common basis" to all schools, thus preventing some of their basic disagreements in what concerns scripture arrangement and status (See: Ulrich Pagel, "The Sacred Writings of Buddhism," in *Buddhism*, ed. Peter Harvey (Continuum: London and New York, 2001), 32–3). Étienne Lamotte takes notice of the fact that the Pali *Tripiṭaka* was not definitively fixed until at least as late as the fifth century AD, and views the claims to having preserved the *Rājagṛha* version as highly incredible (See: Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 129–30). Jens-Uwe Hartmann suggests that the diversity of scripture arrangements, which can be observed starting from the earliest stages of text transmission, is due to the fact that "contrary to the oral transmission of the Vedic texts, which aimed at faithful preservation of the exact wording and for this purpose needed very precise structures, the Buddhists took considerably less interest in the wording and rather tried to preserve ideas and contents, admitting all sorts of redactional changes and developments both on the verbal and on the dogmatic level" (See: Jens-Uwe Hartmann, "From words to books: Indian Buddhist manuscripts in the first millennium CE," in *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober and Claudia Brown (Routledge, 2009), 96).

36 Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 133–40.

37 K. R. Norman, *Pāli Literature*, 11. Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 368.

38 Peter Skilling, "Redaction, recitation, and writing: Transmission of the Buddha's teaching in India in the early period," in *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober and Claudia Brown (Routledge, 2009), 61–2.

The reasons for writing the texts down are known to be connected with the decreasing numbers of monks and lay population (due to famine, war, schism, etc.), which threatened the whole system of oral transmission. This marked the second big step in the canonisation process. The canon of the *Theravāda* tradition, written down in the Pali language in the form of *Tripiṭaka*, was thus “closed.”<sup>39</sup> We possess but an account of this first written canon edition, the actual copy is lost. The oral tradition was not interrupted with the appearance of a written canon: there are accounts of transmission lineages still maintained as late as the fourth century CE.<sup>40</sup>

Writing the scriptures down brought a dramatic change to the transmission of the texts. During the first centuries when they were passed on orally this process was entirely carried out by the monastic community.<sup>41</sup> The introduction of manuscripts gradually shifted this function from the *Samgha* to the books. This in turn resulted in growing accessibility of scripture. Whereas before the monastic institutions possessed full control of both the transmission and the content of the canon (no other authority could decide on introducing new texts to the collection), now the monastery libraries made all of the texts open to reading, copying and translation. This way even the marginal texts could be passed on and find their way to a broader community of followers bypassing the central, orthodox line. It was the first century AD when the Buddhist scriptures started to noticeably grow in numbers.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the introduction of writing increased the possibility of exposing the texts to changes. Oral transmission within the monastic community demanded a large group of people to agree upon an alteration.<sup>43</sup> A written text, on the contrary, could be changed by one single person without any institutional control.<sup>44</sup> These tendencies gave an impulse to the formation of *Mahāyāna* literature with its novel claims to authenticity, as well as a turn towards the cult of the book.

In his work “Orality, Writing, and Authority in South Asian Buddhism...” David McMahan discusses the transition from orality to literacy in the perspective of doctrine legitimation. He notes that “the orality of early Buddhism was not only an instance of historical happenstance, but also an important means by which the early *Samgha* made its claim to authority.”<sup>45</sup> That is to say that the tradition of direct, uninterrupted oral transmission was in itself a claim to authenticity, to the status of *buddhavacana*. In the case of the early *Mahāyāna* movement, on the contrary, literacy became the new tool for legitimation.

39 Ulrich Pagel, “The Sacred Writings of Buddhism,” 51. Charles S. Prebish, “Councils, Buddhist,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson Gale, 2004), 188.

40 J. I. Cabezón, “Scripture,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson Gale, 2004), 755.

41 Hence the system of dividing and grouping the canonical texts into sections (*nikāya*) according to length and content, development of memorisation practices, and high status of the scripture reciters (*bhāṇaka*).

42 Ulrich Pagel, “The Sacred Writings of Buddhism,” 52.

43 For example, Peter Skilling refers to the Pali *Samgūṭisutta*, which repeatedly states that “the teaching should be remembered just as it has been pronounced, and that the monks should recite it together in unison and without contention”. See: Peter Skilling, “Redaction, recitation, and writing...,” 54.

44 David McMahan, “Orality, Writing, and Authority in South Asian Buddhism: Visionary Literature and the Struggle for Legitimacy in the Mahayana,” *History of Religions*, Vol. 37, N.1 (1997), 254.

45 Ibid., 251.

While *Theravāda* consistently arrived at closing its canon, *Mahāyāna* came forth rather as an open tradition,<sup>46</sup> and its new *sūtras* relied on interpreting the concept of *buddhavaṇa*, which made it possible to affirm the sacred status of the newly introduced texts ascribed to the Buddha. The late appearance of these *sūtras* was explained by their advanced philosophical content as compared to the texts of the Lesser Vehicle. According to the followers of *Mahāyāna*, the Buddha disclosed considerably more teachings than can be found in the *Theravāda* collections, but these ingenious doctrines were believed to be concealed in order to be found as soon as the world was ready to handle them. As a rule, the discovery of these texts was set in miraculous circumstances, which triggered their worship and propagation. In other cases it was believed that the doctrines were taught secretly to the select few, or that those who heard the teachings originally did not completely understand them, but passed them on all the same.<sup>47</sup> On the whole, the new *sūtras* were not just legitimised, but put in a claim for a superior position as compared to the old ones.<sup>48</sup>

The differences in defining the bounds of the Buddhist canons are grounded in the divergence of views on the essence of *buddhavaṇa*.

## Buddhavaṇa

The term *buddhavaṇa* refers in the first place to the contents of the *Tripitaka*, thus accentuating its status as the genuine words of the Buddha. This originally meant that the texts in question were pronounced by the historical Buddha during his lifetime, memorised, recited and passed on by his immediate disciples.<sup>49</sup> However, the term has been widely used in broader meanings, which is allowed by the variability of its interpretations. At the dawn of *Mahāyāna* its newly introduced doctrines were criticised by orthodox Buddhists as counterfeit. This criticism was so tangible that it reverberated in the questioned texts themselves.<sup>50</sup> Despite these attacks, the adherents of *Mahāyāna* stood up for the legitimacy of

46 Graeme MacQueen, "Inspired Speech in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism I," *Religion* 11 (1981), 303.

47 David McMahan, "Orality, Writing, and Authority...", 266.

48 A similar pattern of canonising new texts was characteristic of the *Vajrayana* school that developed within the *Mahāyāna* movement in India. It, too, introduced new scriptures, *tantras*, which in turn were ascribed to the historical Buddha or other fully enlightened beings, i. e. claimed the status of *buddhavaṇa*. The tradition of discovering hidden scriptures found its new reincarnation in Tibet: secret doctrines (Tib. *gter ma*) were revealed to merited yogins (Tib. *gter ston*), being either conferred on them in their sleep or during meditation, or found miraculously in the form of a manuscript. In China theories appeared that explained the existence of new texts and conflicting teachings within Buddhism. These theories stated, for instance, that the Buddha simultaneously revealed different doctrines to different listeners according to their capacity to understand. This helped to both acknowledge the authority of the texts, and attribute to them the highest degree of value (See: *Ibid.*, 267).

49 George D. Bond, "Buddhavaṇa (Word of the Buddha)," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson Gale, 2004), 93–4.

50 Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Authority and Orality in the Mahāyāna," *Numen* 42 (1995), 22–3. For instance, Graeme MacQueen suggests considering a passage from chapter 17 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, in which *Māra* is depicted disguised as a *śramaṇa* who calls upon the practitioner trying to admonish him to abandon the *Prajñāpāramitā* teaching as false ("the work of poets") and turn to the genuine Word of the Buddha. See: Graeme MacQueen, "Inspired Speech in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism I," *Religion* 11 (1981), 304. See also: Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Authority and Orality in the Mahāyāna," 24–5.

their *sūtras* as the Word of the Buddha. The traditional introduction formula of the Pali *sūtras* “Thus have I heard...” (Skr. *evam mayā śrutam*), the words with which *Ānanda* started the recitation of every text at the First Council to indicate that he had heard and memorised these teachings directly from his master, is found in all the *Mahāyāna sūtras* as well.<sup>51</sup>

The classic statements of what *buddhavacana* is can be found inside the *Tripitaka*, namely in the *Vinaya* section which gives an account of the First Council, and the *Mahāpa-desasutta* (*Dīghanikāya*).<sup>52</sup> All the accounts, though differing in details, emphasise that *sūtras* were the exact words of the Buddha recited by *Ānanda* and recognised by the pure council of *arhats*. All the *Vinayas* therewith mention that *Dharma*, or *buddhavacana*, can as well be uttered by the auditors (Skr. *śrāvaka*), wise recluses (Skr. *ṛṣi*), gods (Skr. *deva*) and apparitional beings (Skr. *upapāduka*).<sup>53</sup> *De facto*, however, this principle is not without reservations. First of all, *Ānanda* is said not to have been present at all the sermons of his master. Secondly, parts of certain *sūtras* contain words of speakers other than the Buddha. These deviations from the rule remain not reflected upon inside the tradition.<sup>54</sup> Graeme MacQueen sorts out three types of alternative discourse in the *sūtras*: (1) expansion and interpretation of *buddhavacana* (the most prominent disciples develop, and comment on, the brief propositions made by their master, i. e. what they say is a continuation of the Buddha’s Word rather than new information; in a wider aspect this is associated with the *Abhidharma* tradition), (2) sermons and remarks not related to the Buddha’s words (a vast and diverse body of discourse coming from speakers of different levels, from the Buddha’s immediate disciples to lay people, often bearing very indirect connection with the words of the *Bhagavān*), and (3) spontaneous inspired utterances (distinguished by being introduced with the help of *prati-bhā* constructions and specified as “inspired speech”—*pratibhāna*). Graeme MacQueen states the absolute necessity of the above mentioned “disputable” utterances to be endorsed by the Buddha immediately before or after their occurrence (often both), or through authorisation of speakers (this refers mostly to the great disciples praised by the Buddha).<sup>55</sup> In other words, *Tripitaka* defines *buddhavacana* as not necessarily spoken by the Buddha, but necessarily acknowledged by him, which naturally implies that the Buddha’s presence in the world is essential.

51 David McMahan, “Orality, Writing, and Authority...,” 265. Even though it is hardly possible to find out whether the partisans of the new *sūtras* truly believed that the Buddha had actually uttered these sermons, a lot can be explained by certain nuances of the traditional definitions of *buddhavacana*. The implications of the phrase “Thus have I heard...” were discussed by commentators inside the tradition for many centuries, which shows that the question was not at all transparent and called for illustration. See: Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “Authority and Orality in the Mahāyāna,” 21–2.

52 Gorge D. Bond, “Buddhavacana (Word of the Buddha),” 94.

53 Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 163.

54 In particular, the Buddha’s disciples are known to have played a major role in the transmission and explanation of his teachings, and *sūtras* spoken by them are found in the Pali *Tripitaka*. See: Peter Skilling, “Redaction, recitation, and writing: Transmission of the Buddha’s teaching in India in the early period,” in *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober and Claudia Brown (Routledge, 2009), 53. See also: Graeme MacQueen, “Inspired Speech in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism I,” 305–6.

55 *Ibid.*, 307–9.

The ability to inspired speech arises from permanent states of mental clarity achieved by the speakers that allow them to spontaneously and confidently produce arguments of perfect doctrinal credibility.<sup>56</sup> In this light an interpretational play revolved around the somewhat ambiguous statement “all that the Buddha has said is well said,”<sup>57</sup> or rather its modification—“whatever is well said (Skr. *subhāṣita*) is the word of the Buddha.”<sup>58</sup> This is to say that all that is true, i. e. transmits the essence of *Dharma* and thereafter corresponds to the aims of the Buddha’s Teaching, is equal to the Word of the Buddha. This formula does not mention the source of *subhāṣita*, which can be interpreted as stating that the circle of potential producers of *buddhavacana* is not restricted to the Buddha, his disciples and members of the *Samgha*.<sup>59</sup> This refers to inspirational speech (Skr. *pratibhāna*) as well, and it was exactly this reasoning that helped legitimise the *Mahāyāna sūtras* in the first place, preparing the ground for further formation of the body of Buddhist scriptures as an open canon.<sup>60</sup>

As has been stated above, a wider reconsideration of the concept of *buddhavacana* that marked a switch from its historical understanding (as spoken by a particular person in a particular time) to one based on meaning and function, came along with the emergence of the *Mahāyāna sūtras*. The very problem of historicity was solved by drawing special attention not to the Buddha’s worldly form visible to everyone (Skr. *nirmāṇakāya*), but rather to his supermundane manifestations (like the “complete enjoyment body”—*sambhogakāya*).<sup>61</sup> The drift from historicity in the *Mahāyāna* literature is not unambiguous: claims to historical foundations are still used as one of the tools of text legitimation, but now they are based on rewriting the history and interpreting it anew, on “introducing a different frame of reference in which tales lead back not to events, but to other tales.”<sup>62</sup>

A demonstrative declaration of the new understanding of scriptural discourse is found in the very beginning of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, one of the oldest and most authoritative *sūtras* of this tradition. Here the Buddha opens the argument with encouraging *Subhūti* to expound on how *bodhisattvas* make their way to the perfection of wisdom, the

56 Alongside with that Graeme MacQueen marks out another kind of *pratibhāna* based on faith and natural gift. See: Ibid., 312–3.

57 Sanskrit: *e kechi bhamte bhagavatā budhena bhāṣite sarve se subhāṣite*. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “Authority and Orality in the Mahāyāna,” 27.

58 Sanskrit: *yat kiṃcinmaitreya subhāṣitaṃ sarvaṃ tadbuddhabhāritaṃ*. This example is also found in *Adhyāśayaśāṇḍodanasūtra* and *Anguttaranikāya*. See: Ibid., 27, 44.

59 Ibid., 28

60 Paul Harrison, “Canon,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson Gale, 2004), 112.

61 Hearing the Teaching from a higher transcendent form of the Buddha could be interpreted as indicating to the advanced level of both the doctrine and the listener, as opposed to the limitations of the common, earthly level on which the old *sūtras* were received (See: David McMahan, “Orality, Writing, and Authority...,” 271–2). The history itself came to be reinterpreted. Quoting Donald Lopez: “The early history of the dharma, already highly mythologized into a sacred history, was fictionalized further in the Mahāyāna sutras, creating eventually another sacred history; to legitimate these newly appearing texts, their authors claimed the principal figures of the earlier collection, indeed its very codifiers (*Śāriputra*, *Maudgalyāyana*, *Kāśyapa*, *Subhūti*) as converts to the Buddha’s true (but previously unrevealed) teaching and as central characters in its drama” (See: Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “Authority and Orality in the Mahāyāna,” 25).

62 Ibid., 26.