



Manuscripts 2740/ M 469, illustrations of Tibetan ritual objects



Manuscript 2740/0/2. Fragile manuscript in gold and silver

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# Tibetan Treasures in Leiden: Progress Report on the Metamorfoze Project

Report > Tibet

The Kern Institute Library preserves a unique collection of approximately 1,580 Tibetan manuscripts and block-prints collected by Johan van Manen (1877-1943). Since their arrival in the Netherlands in 1936 and 1943, they have mainly benefited local scholars. This collection will soon be available for public reference.

By Kalsang Norbu Gurung and Tharphen Lingsang

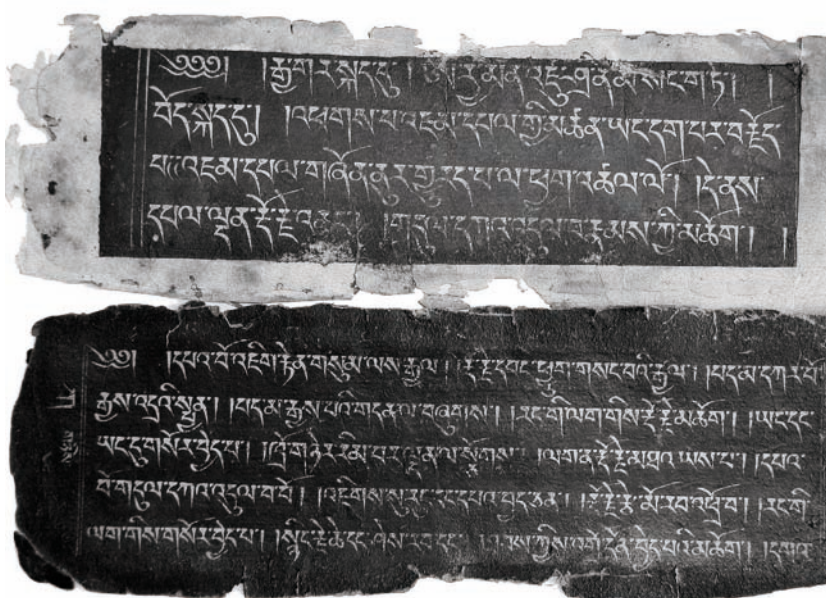
The Johan van Manen collection contains a wide cross-section of Tibetan Buddhist and Bon literature: important works of dGe lugs pa, rNying ma pa and bKa' brgyud pa masters. Only a few texts of the Sa skya pa and other schools are included. This no doubt reflects van Manen's or his assistants' personal interests, or limitations on the areas they were able to visit. Particularly interesting are two different versions of an old Bon text, called *Klu 'bum*.

The collection also contains many interesting manuscripts that may not be available elsewhere. Some seem to be unique copies that were never published after van Manen obtained them.

Sadly, more than twenty texts from the collection were badly damaged during transportation; much of that damage is irreparable and the affected texts could not be filmed. Another solution must be found to make them accessible. A further sixteen texts, recorded in the de Nebesky-Wojkowitz catalogue, cannot be found.

## Cataloguing

The collection has been catalogued twice: first by René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz from 1953-1955, and then by Chongla and Rechung, handwritten in Tibetan, from 1961-1965. The former focuses on (margin) titles and page numbers. The latter comprises several large volumes containing further details: authors, subjects, and occasionally, additional colophon notes. Although the Chongla and Rechung catalogue provides detailed information, its loose-leaf format is



Block-prints 2740/ H 46 and 2740/H 67, two different versions of old Bon text: *Klu 'bum*

rather impractical. We mainly use the Nebesky-Wojkowitz catalogue and only consult the Tibetan one where more information is needed. The Kern Institute Library classifies Tibetan works by religious school (dGe lugs pa, Jo nang pa, etc.). We adhere to the Wylie system of data entry. Diacritics are only used for transliterations of Sanskrit. Incorrect spellings of Sanskrit have been recorded as alternative spellings in the thesaurus description, alongside the correct transliteration.

## Specific Problems

A number of problems were encountered during cataloguing. Sub-chapters or texts belonging to particular sets were separated in the van Manen collection. Moreover, their local accession-codes (inventory numbers) often are not continuous. Similarly, tables of contents were occasionally separated from the texts and given separate accession-codes. This makes it very difficult to identify the affected texts, as the crucial data usually appear in the colophon at the end of the collection. It is not always clear whether constituent texts were left in their original order. All texts have been microfilmed and arranged by their inventory number. In the catalogue, we identify their provenance by means of their Chief and Family title.

A second problem is authorship. Tibetan texts were often written for special occasions, at the behest of a student or teacher; commonly all those involved are mentioned. The whole colophon has to be read to locate the name of the author, who usually refers to himself at the end of the text. However, when mentioned by someone else (e.g. an editor),

his name appears at the beginning, with the title. Tibetan authors, moreover, use many different names and titles. They also use abbreviated or Sanskrit names, or refer to themselves merely by a title; establishing identity can be very difficult. In this regard we would like to acknowledge the usefulness of the *Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center* on-line database ([www.tbrc.org](http://www.tbrc.org)). Many Tibetan texts are considered to be re-discovered texts (Tib. *gter ma*). These usually only contain the discoverer's name (Tib. *gter ston*), which we then use for cataloguing. In those rare cases where an earlier author is mentioned, we render both.

Third, as is well known in the classification of Tibetan texts, many authors are unknown and texts are often without contents pages. In these cases we have used the most likely keyword(s) for classification.

Finally, the compilers of both catalogues misread a number of titles, which have now been changed to the most plausible title. Parts of titles that are illegible due to erasure and damage have been replaced with ellipses in our on-line data. Where title pages are missing, we use margin titles or titles written on a separate sheet by the collectors.

As a result of the *Metamorfoze Project*, a wide range of Tibetan sources and materials will become available for research. Thus far, we have processed more than half of the texts and these are now available on microfilm. We hope the entire collection will be available by the time this article appears in print. Concluding this project, we hope to publish a more detailed catalogue of the collection. <

## References

- Chongla N. Losang and Rechung J. Phunghang (1965) *A Descriptive Catalogue of The Collection of Tibetan Printed Books Kept in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde (National Museum for Ethnology) Kanjur texts excluded*, Leiden
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- Nebesky-Wojkowitz, René de (1953-1955) *Catalogue of The Collections of Tibetan Blockprints and Manuscripts in The National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde)*, Leiden
- Wylie, Turrell (1959) *A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription*, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 22: 261-67

*Kalsang Norbu Gurung and Tharphen Lingsang are cataloguing the Tibetan collection for the Metamorfoze Project in the Library of the Kern Institute, Leiden University, the Netherlands.*

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## Note >

See also 'Preserving Tibetan Heritage' by Dory Heilijgers, *IIAS Newsletter* 29, [http://www.iias.nl/iiasnl/29/IIASNL\\_29\\_25.pdf](http://www.iias.nl/iiasnl/29/IIASNL_29_25.pdf)

## Tibetological Collections & Archives Series

Kalsang Norbu Gurung's and Tharphen Lingsang's *Tibetan Treasures in Leiden: Progress Report on the Metamorfoze Project* is the eleventh contribution to the Tibetological Collections and Archives Series devoted to projects on cataloguing, 'computerization' (inputting and scanning), editing, and translation of Tibetan language collections and archives. In this series, colleagues present their initiatives to the wider public and update the scholarly world on the progress of their projects. Some are high-profile, of which Tibetologists are generally aware, yet some are less well known. I hope the projects presented will benefit from the exposure and response this coverage will engender. <

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