

# Dating Early Tibetan Manuscripts: A Paleographical Method

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## Introduction

The study of early Tibetan written sources is bedevilled by problems of dating. While the imperial inscriptions can usually be dated to the reign of a particular monarch, the bulk of the manuscript material – both documentary and literary – contains no explicit date, and often no clues implicit in the text either. Thus we are limited to placing these manuscripts in timespans that may be much wider than we would like. In the case of the manuscripts from imperial Tibetan forts in the Taklamakan desert, the most important of which are the sites excavated at Mirān and Mazār Tāgh, the span is tolerably narrow. These manuscripts may be dated to the second major expansion of the Tibetan Empire, between the mid-eighth and mid-ninth century.

However, when we come to the more varied and interesting material found in the sealed cave in Dunhuang, the range of dates is wider, beginning with the Tibetan conquest of Dunhuang (often dated to 786/7) and continuing to the apparent date when the cave was sealed, at the beginning of the eleventh century. Thus we have a span of, more or less, two centuries. What has particularly vexed scholars is the fact that there is often no clear way to tell whether or not a manuscript was written during the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang, and therefore belongs to the imperial period.<sup>1</sup>

Recently, scholars working with this material have begun to look towards paleography as a means of overcoming this problem. However, simply stating that one has dated a manuscript on paleographical grounds is not sufficient to convince others, and as yet no method has been described that might constitute an acceptable basis for dating. My aim here is to lay the groundwork for a method of paleographical dating, based on the following principles:

(i) That the manuscripts which we can date to the imperial period may be classified into a limited number of writing styles. These are strongly correlated with specific genres of text. We may call these “imperial-period writing styles.”<sup>2</sup>

1 Sometimes these imperial period documents are referred to as “Old Tibetan.” However, I think that this unhelpfully elides the distinction between linguistic aspects of the text and other features of the manuscript, including paleography. It is probably better to retain the term Old Tibetan for linguistics, rather than as a catch-all term for anything dating from the imperial period.

2 I have presented a typology of these styles in van Schaik forthcoming a, where I have discussed the principle behind the development of a paleographical typology, and discussed in greater detail the sources used. Here the same typology is presented as an aid to dating, with the emphasis on the specific forms of individual letters in each style. In an earlier paper, van Schaik 2012, I presented a slightly different typology, containing a “military style” and excluding the “monastic style.” I now believe that the

(ii) That the appearance of a much wider variety of writing styles in the manuscripts which have been dated to post-imperial times show that a ‘paradigm shift’ in Tibetan writing occurred after the fall of the empire.

(iii) That, therefore, if a manuscript can be identified with one of the known imperial-period writing styles, this serves as an argument for placing it within that period.<sup>3</sup>

## A. Typology of Imperial-Period Writing Styles

### 1. *Epigraphic Style*

A paleography of the Tibetan script should start with the pillar inscriptions from Central Tibet.<sup>4</sup> Not only are these the earliest dated instances of writing, but they are productions of the Tibetan imperial court, and therefore represent an officially sanctioned writing style. However, when we look at the inscriptions from the point of view of paleography, we can see that they are by no means stylistically homogenous. As Helga Uebach has recently pointed out, there are significant differences between the style found in the Zhol pillar (dating from the 760s) and that of the Bsam yas pillar (dating from around the time the temple was established in 779).<sup>5</sup> I do not think we need to follow her conclusion that the latter is a post-imperial copy, however. This period was clearly one in which the Tibetan script was undergoing a rapid process of change. The two pillars on either side of the Temple of Zhwa, which were constructed some ten years apart (c.800 and 812), show significant differences in orthography.<sup>6</sup> The writing style of the Treaty pillar, erected in 823, takes the developments seen in the Bsam yas and Zhol pillars even further.

One aspect of these developments in early Tibetan epigraphic writing may be the infiltration of manuscript styles into epigraphy. By this I mean that features of writing that emerge from the technology of pen, paper, and the human hand inform the style

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many different writing styles found in the military documents from Mirān and Mazār Tāgh are better understood as variations on the official style (and occasionally the square style).

3 Of course, this remains an argument that must be defended. It must be kept in mind that a style taught in the imperial period would probably survive the fall of the Tibetan Empire by at least a generation. In the conclusion to the present paper I suggest that other methods of analysis should always be used to support dating on paleographical grounds.

4 On the inscriptions, see Richardson 1985; Li and Coblin 1987; and Iwao, Hill, and Takeuchi 2009. There were no doubt earlier examples of Tibetan writing which are no longer available to us. Early documents seem to have been written on wood, but none of these is extant (see Uebach 2008). The early stone inscriptions can be divided into three groups. The first, containing the most important sources for the epigraphic style, comprises the pillar inscriptions from Central Tibet; the second comprises religious inscriptions from Northeastern Tibet (Amdo); and the third various examples of graffiti from the Ladakh area. In addition, there are a number of inscriptions on bells; the earliest of these is a recently discovered bell from the reign of Khri Lde gtsug brtsan (r. 712–c.754); see Lha mchog rgyal 2011. For the purpose of the present typology, “epigraphic style” refers only to the first group of inscriptions.

5 See Uebach 2011. Although I am not convinced by Uebach’s conclusions regarding the Bsam yas pillar, this article is a fine example of the application of paleography to early Tibetan sources.

6 Some of the differences between the pillars at the west and east of the Zhwa temple entrance were discussed by Hugh Richardson; observing more archaic features in the earlier, western pillar, he suggested that “the differences may represent a conscious standardization during the reign of Khri Lde strong brtsan.” See Richardson 1985: 45.

of epigraphic inscriptions. This process accounts for what Uebach perceives as “irregularities” in the style of the Bsam yas pillar, such as the inclination of certain letters in the direction of writing. This stylistic feature is more and more apparent in the later inscriptions. In the East Zhwa pillar (812), for example, we see the descender of *ga* angled in the direction of writing. In the Treaty Pillar (823), we see the descenders of certain letters including *ka* and *ga* curving slightly towards the right, even with the trace of a tick at the bottom.<sup>7</sup>

In any case, the inscriptions share enough features that it is useful to talk about an “epigraphic style.” As with other epigraphic scripts, the writing style of the Tibetan pillar inscriptions tends to prefer straight lines, and does not extend lines any further than necessary. In a similar fashion to Roman Capitals, the letters are evenly proportioned so that most would fit within the shape of a square (though the need to vertically stack Tibetan letters requires a more flexible model). Descenders of letters like *ka* and *ga* do not extend far, and likewise the vowel signs are compact. The two ‘wings’ of the *na ro* are of roughly equal length, unlike in later manuscript styles in which the right wing may extend much further, in the direction of writing. This “square” character extends to the four-cornered shape of the letter *ba*, and other letter elements like the left side of the *ga*. The “heads” of the letters also adhere to this principle, being much longer than in later styles in letters like *pa* and *la*. This harks back to the Indic models for the Tibetan script.<sup>8</sup> Other features that are perhaps closer to the script’s Indic elements than to later styles are the diagonal line that extends all the way from the top right to bottom left of the *pha*, and the fact that the two downstrokes of the *ta* both descend from the letter’s head. These features are carried through into the square style seen in the manuscripts.

## 2. Square Style

This and the following styles are found in manuscripts, rather than epigraphic sources. The square style appears in several documents from the library cave at Dunhuang which are generally thought to have been copied during the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang or shortly afterwards (i.e. late eighth to mid-ninth centuries). Perhaps the best examples of the square style are the manuscripts of the ‘civil version’ of the *Old Tibetan Annals*.<sup>9</sup> Other manuscripts in this style include (i) historical or semi-historical texts; (ii) legal texts on theft, hunting and other crimes; (iii) dice divination texts, which may be related to the legal texts as dice divination seems to have been used to settle legal disputes;<sup>10</sup> and (iv) texts on royal funerary practices. Though it is clear that most of these manuscripts were copied in or around Dunhuang itself, the texts share the feature

7 On the East Zhwa pillar, see *ga* on ll.38 and 40. On the Treaty pillar, see *ga* on l.54 and *ka* on l.55 of the west face of the pillar. Note that in both cases the angled descender is not a regular feature, which also suggests that it was not an accepted formal feature of the epigraphic style, but an occasional and accidental development. This also suggests an outside influence, e.g. from manuscript writing styles.

8 On this matter, see van Schaik 2011. Note that this feature is true of the earlier inscriptions, but less so in later inscriptions such as the Treaty Pillar.

9 These are the two manuscripts IOL Tib J 750 and Pelliot tibétain 1288. On the *Annals*, see Dotson 2009.

10 See Dotson 2007.

of emanating from the central authority of the imperium. Thus they seem to be local copies of texts circulated through the empire, and their particular style may represent that of the exemplars that were circulated.<sup>11</sup>

In general, there is a clear developmental link between the square style and that of the inscriptions from Central Tibet. The square style copies the short, largely straight, strokes of the epigraphic style, with an even width of line throughout. The features of manuscript writing that we see in the Treaty pillar are present here: a tendency for straight descenders to incline slightly to the right, and to end with small ticks; and extended length in the vowel signs. We also see a development that continues through the rest of the styles in this typology: the collapse of the left side of the *ga* from a four-cornered to a three-cornered shape. The *ba* also becomes three-cornered in some (though not all) instances.

Features of specific letter forms:

- TA: downstroke from the head is straight often and quite long, showing its derivation from Brāhmī TA.
- PHA: diagonal line extends across the whole letter form, from right top tip to bottom left corner.
- BA, and left side of GA: square or trapezoid shape, not a triangle (in some cases the three-corned form is also seen).
- LA: long flat “head” on right vertical. Similar to Early Gupta Brāhmī, not preserved in later Tibetan styles.

### 3. *Sutra Style*

This is essentially an umbrella term for the writing styles found in the thousands of Buddhist sutras produced by Tibetan imperial *diktat* in the first half of the ninth century.<sup>12</sup> These manuscripts are well known from the Dunhuang collections, and seem to be of two types: those produced in Dunhuang itself, and those brought as exemplars from elsewhere in the Tibetan Empire. Recent research based on paper analysis suggests that the latter may have come from Eastern Tibet.<sup>13</sup> Recently, sutra manuscripts very like those from Dunhuang (the first type) have also been found in monastic libraries in Central Tibet, suggesting that Dunhuang operated as an important scriptorium for the Tibetan Empire. Many of the features of the sutra style are a further development of the principles of manuscript writing that mark the evolution of the epigraphic and square styles. Clearly, the sutra style is the result of an attempt to retain clarity while allowing scribes to write swiftly and at length. Thus many of the features characteristic of these manuscripts appear to be the result of writing quickly.

We see an increasing length of final strokes (mainly descenders and vowel signs). We also see a tendency for lines to move away from the vertical, in the directions of easier

11 Géza Uray (1962) suggested that IOL Tib J 753 (on the law of theft) is likely to have been composed in Central Tibet no later than the mid-eighth century.

12 The most recent analysis of the process of commissioning and executing this mass-production of Buddhist scripture is the paper by Kazushi Iwao in the present volume.

13 See Helman-Wazny and van Schaik 2012. See also the three articles by Marcelle Lalou (1954; 1957; and 1964).

articulation at 5 o'clock and 7 o'clock, and the ticks on the end of strokes are often pronounced.<sup>14</sup> These two features sometimes combine to produce a slight wave shape (like a backwards *S*) in descenders and *shad*. Due to the scribe's unwillingness to remove the pen from the paper (which slows writing) we often see loops at the head of the *sa*, the bottom of the *ra* and the bottom right of the *pa*, for example. By the same principle, some corners may be rounded off (for instance at the top right of the *ga*).

More significantly, we see in the sutra style clear changes in the ductus of certain letter forms. These are changes in the strokes and stroke order used to form a letter, which strongly suggest a specific way of teaching the script, differing from the way the script was taught to those who produced the exemplars for the pillar inscriptions and the manuscripts in the square style. Such changes in the ductus generally facilitate writing quickly. They include, for example, forms of *ka* and *ga* in which the number of strokes is reduced. Having said this, it must be admitted that there is great stylistic variation among these sutra manuscripts, with some appearing closer to the square style, and others closer to the headed version of the official style. I have thought it useful to classify them together because these particular manuscripts form a coherent group, in terms of their content and historical context.<sup>15</sup>

Features of specific letter forms:

- PHA: Diagonal line becomes smaller, reducing into the bottom right corner.
- BA: Becomes triangular, usually keeping its flat head stroke.
- 'A: Often loses its "tail-stroke" on the bottom right.
- LA: Often loses its flat head on the right vertical.

#### 4. Official Styles

Two official styles are found in official documents such as letters, contracts, and land registers dated to the Tibetan imperial period. The styles are seen in manuscripts from Dunhuang, and the two Tibetan military bases at the Central Asian sites of Mirān and Mazār Tāgh. The geographical extent of the official styles is confirmed by their presence in two letters sent to Dunhuang from Central Tibet.<sup>16</sup> Many of these manuscripts contain seals, either the square official seals, the small round personal seals, or the so-called "finger seals."<sup>17</sup>

##### 4.a Headed

The headed version of the official style is similar to some aspects of the sutra style, though there is no overt lengthening of downstrokes and vowel strokes which we often see in the sutra style. The general impression is of a compact and efficient handwriting. As in the sutra style, the speed of writing sometimes causes ticks at the end of lines and a tendency to incline in the direction of writing, to the right.

14 This directional development is one of the "principles of ease" in writing described by Peter van Sommers (see van Sommers 1991).

15 The vast majority of scribes named in the sutra colophons are not encountered anywhere else. In Dunhuang, most were Chinese.

16 These are P. tib. 1085 (from Lhan kar) and IOL Tib J 1459 (from 'On cang do).

17 On the Tibetan seals, see Takeuchi 1995: 107–15. Those letters among these manuscripts without such seals should probably be considered to be copies or drafts.

Features of specific letter forms:

- KA: Executed with two strokes.
- BA and head of GA: Consistent triangular shape.

#### 4.b Headless

The headless version of the official style is a fully cursive script, eliminating all strokes except those that are absolutely necessary for recognition of the letters – including the heads that are found in all other styles from the imperial period. We also see the rounding-out of corners, another feature of fully cursive styles in other writing systems.<sup>18</sup> Thus the style is characterized by a rounded appearance. Some letters are reduced to a bare minimum, such as the *sa*, which comes to resemble the *pa*. The ‘wave’ shape is also apparent in longer strokes such as the *shad*. In that this is the earliest dated form of Tibetan writing which omits the heads on many letters, it can be considered a precursor to all later Tibetan headless (*dbu med*) styles.

Features of specific letter forms:

- CA, CHA, JA, TA, DA, NA, PA, PHA, BA, RA, LA: No head.
- KA: Executed with two strokes and without a distinct head.
- KA and GA: Top of letter oriented towards the left.
- PA: a simple, rounded U shape.
- BA: One stroke, almost circular.
- LA: One stroke with no angles.
- SA: A three-stroke form similar to the PA of the square style.

#### 5. Monastic Style

This style is seen in manuscripts produced in the circle of the Dunhuang-based translator 'Go Chos grub, also known by his Chinese name, Facheng 法成. This translator was active during the last decades of the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang, during which time he made several translations from Chinese into Tibetan.<sup>19</sup> The Dunhuang collections include several of these translations, as well as treatises written by Chos grub in Tibetan and Chinese. Many of these manuscripts are written in a similar handwriting, and Daishun Ueyama has argued that some are in the hand of Chos grub himself.<sup>20</sup> Whether this is the case or not, we can identify a consistent style across these manuscripts. The same highly cursive style is found in a number of Vinaya manuscripts

18 Similar letter forms are seen in certain rock inscriptions in Ladakh (near Alchi). See Snellgrove and Skorupski 1980: 159. See also van Schaik 2012, where I discuss the question of the origin of the Tibetan headless (*dbu med*) script based on these early cursive writing styles.

19 The ethnicity of Chos grub is disputed, with some scholars seeing him as a Tibetan, others as Chinese. Ueyama (1990) has pointed out, regarding the name 'Go, that while it could be a Tibetan name, the orthography suggests that it is a transliteration of the Chinese surname Wu 吳.

20 Ueyama 1995: 93–94. The manuscripts that Ueyama identifies as possibly being in Chos grub's own handwriting are: IOL Tib J 686 (p. 93, pl. 12), 687 (p. 93, pl. 13), 217 (p. 93, pl. 13), 218 (p. 93, pl. 13), and P. tib. 2205 (=P.ch.2035) (p. 93–4, pl. 22). And Ueyama identifies Chos grub's Chinese hand in the colophons of: P. ch. 2886 (p. 94, pl. 21), Or.8210/S.3927, (p. 94, pl. 30), and Or.8210/S.5309, (p. 94, pl. 31).



and in the interlinear annotations of Buddhist texts. However, only the manuscripts associated with Chos grub can be dated with any confidence to the imperial period.

The monastic style is, like the “headless” official style, essentially cursive. Even more than the latter, manuscripts often show signs of having been written at great speed. The letters look more “loose” in that strokes are often left uncompleted; for example, the left side of the *ga* is often completely open. The letters are small and compact, and unlike other styles they tend to extend further horizontally than vertically. Legibility seems to have been a low priority for the writers of these manuscripts, and we might speculate that they were written mainly to be read by the scribe or a small group of monastic “insiders.”

Features of specific letter forms:

- GA: Left side is often completely open.
- MY-: Executed in one stroke, resulting in the elision of the right vertical.
- 'A: Generally no tick.
- LA: First downstroke almost disappears.

### Using the Typology to Date Manuscripts

The typology outlined above is not exhaustive, but it does cover the majority of the imperial-period Tibetan manuscripts. On this basis, it ought to be possible to assign an imperial-period date to manuscripts which can be identified with one of the styles in the typology. Of course, this is only possible if we also have an idea of what we are trying to do with this dating – to *distinguish* imperial from post-imperial manuscripts among the Dunhuang collections. So, in addition to understanding how the styles in the typology differ from each other, as outlined above, we need to have some understanding of how they differ from post-imperial styles.

#### 1. Comparisons with post-Imperial Tibetan writing styles

Fortunately, recent work on the Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang has identified a large group of manuscripts that can confidently be dated to the post-imperial period. This provides us with a good sample to compare with the imperial-period manuscripts. When we look at this sample, one thing becomes clear – the nice association of writing styles with types of manuscript that we see in the imperial period is not to be found here. It is not difficult to imagine a historical explanation for this. As the Tibetan Empire disintegrated in the middle of the ninth century, so did many of the formal, bureaucratic systems that underlay the production of manuscripts. In these systems, both writers and readers would assume that certain writing styles were appropriate to certain types of manuscript. It is also possible that specific writing styles were taught to specific classes of scribes, including, for example, official clerical scribes, sutra copyists, and soldiers.

Now, this is not to say that such a system would have instantly disappeared, but as Tibetan scribal culture developed without a central authority to formalize style, a greater diversity of styles could develop, with fewer restrictions on which styles were appropriate for specific types of text. This is indeed what we see in the dated post-imperial manuscripts. These tend to fall into two general groups: letters and Buddhist texts.

Géza Uray was the first to identify post-imperial texts in the Tibetan manuscripts, and his analysis concentrated on the letters. Tsuguhito Takeuchi continued Uray's work, and extended it to Buddhist manuscripts; recent work on the tantric manuscripts by myself and Jacob Dalton has added many more Buddhist manuscripts to this post-imperial group.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.a Epistolary Styles

These manuscripts cannot be said to share a coherent style to the same extent as the letters written in the imperial period, which are generally in one of the official styles. However, the post-imperial letters do share certain features which help us to distinguish them from imperial period letters. Most noticeably, they are usually written in a headless style that is more calligraphic than the headless styles from the imperial period (i.e. the official and monastic styles). These calligraphic elements include: (i) The lengthening of descenders and vowel signs – like the *zhabs kyu* – well beyond what is needed for letter recognition; this can be seen in many manuscripts, including Pelliot tibétain 1106. (ii) A return to sharper angles at the corners of certain letters, such as *da* and *ra*; see for example the second letter in IOL Tib 754. (iii) An alternation between heavy and light lines – known as “shading” – suggesting the calligraphic use of a flat-nibbed pen; a good example of this is Pelliot tibétain 1129.<sup>22</sup>

Thus it seems that the development towards ease of articulation apparently reached its fullest expression in the official and monastic headless styles in the imperial period, and what followed could be described as a trend towards introducing calligraphic elements into this headless style. Such a pendulum-like movement between cursive and calligraphic styles, between ease of articulation and the desire for decoration, has been observed in the development of European scripts as well. The paleographer Albert Derolez has described this process in the evolution of the “documentary script” in Europe, concluding: “Seen in this way, the history of script might be described as an alternation of increasing cursivity, on the one hand, and consolidation and calligraphy, on the other.”<sup>23</sup>

### 1.b Buddhist Styles

It is in the post-imperial Buddhist texts that we see the real development of Tibetan calligraphy after the fall of the Tibetan Empire. This is particularly evident in the headless styles. Here we see certain calligraphic features becoming almost regular – in the sharp angles of letters like *ga*, *ra*, and *la*, which produce a more attractive letter form, but require the scribe to cease the motion of his or her pen in order to form the angle. We also find that some letters, such as *ka*, now require an increased number of strokes. The letter *ga* is often seen in an angular open-topped form that is rarely seen in the imperial

21 See Uray 1981; Takeuchi 2004 and 2012; Dalton and van Schaik 2006.

22 On the post-imperial letters, see Uray 1981 and Takeuchi 1990. Takeuchi also shows that the formal greeting pattern at the beginning of letters may be used to date them.

23 Derolez 2003: 5. Elsewhere Derolez attempts a detailed description of “the various ways of introducing greater formality in an informal cursive script” (Derolez 2003: 128–30). These include (i) a reduction in the number of ligatures; (ii) a move back to a more complicated ductus (i.e. more strokes); (iii) a move toward shading (the calligraphic alternation of wide and narrow strokes) where a broad-nibbed pen is used; and (iv) an increasing angularity.



period. As in the headed Buddhist styles, the “wave” element is embedded in many letter forms, and some scribes use shading quite consistently.

A very good example of the tenth-century Buddhist headless style is the manuscript of the *Upāyapāśā* commentary written by the scribe Kam cu pa Bu’o ko (IOL Tib J 321), apparently a Chinese from Ganzhou. A number of other manuscripts, mainly containing tantric texts, are found in the same style of writing.<sup>24</sup> Another style is characterized by notably long descenders, and often attenuated upper parts in some letters, such as the *na*. Several manuscripts with this writing style are linked with Khotan, being paginated with Khotanese page numbers (see for example, IOL Tib J 341).<sup>25</sup> Another common writing style, a cursive style with sharper angles than the imperial-period headless styles, is seen in the scroll Pelliot tibétain 849, which is dated to the late tenth or early eleventh century.<sup>26</sup>

When we turn to the headed styles found in post-imperial Buddhist manuscripts, distinctions from imperial period styles are not always easily made, as scribes sometimes followed the methods of the imperial-period sutra style very closely when writing Buddhist texts. On the other hand, there is a calligraphic development in many post-imperial headed styles that parallels the calligraphic elaboration in the headless styles. One significant characteristic may be taken as a defining element of these calligraphic post-imperial headed styles – the wave shape that we saw appearing more or less accidentally in the sutra style. In these later manuscripts this shape becomes embedded in the letter forms themselves, as a calligraphic element of writing. Though the wave shape is sometimes not very pronounced, it is consistently employed in the descenders of letters like *na* and *ga* and in the *shad* (see for example IOL Tib J 709). In some hands this effect is deliberately accentuated by lengthening the descenders.

## 2. Identifying manuscripts using individual letter forms

The classification of a manuscript into one or other of the above types requires a certain degree of familiarity with the range of styles seen in the manuscripts. The wider experience one has with the manuscripts, the easier it becomes to perceive the general groups into which they fall. This is not to say that paleography can only be practiced as a kind of connoisseurship; in fact much of the work in European paleography in the twentieth century was an attempt to ground paleography in rigorous description. The description of stroke order and direction, known as ductus, makes it possible to communicate the recognitions of the specific forms of letters that allow of paleographical classification.<sup>27</sup>

Although it would be ideal to provide a full table containing examples of every syllable in each style type, I will here concentrate on two letter forms, chosen because they can be used to show the development and distinctions present at each stage of the

24 On this manuscript, see Cantwell and Mayer 2011. A very similar style is seen in a folio found in Kharakhoto (IOL Tib M 50), probably dating from the twelfth or thirteenth century.

25 On these manuscripts, see Dalton, Davis and van Schaik 2007. A similar preference for long descenders is also seen in some Kharakhoto manuscripts (e.g. IOL Tib M 52).

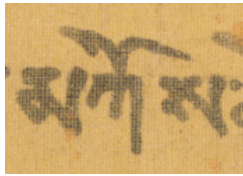

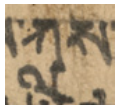
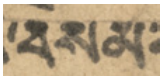
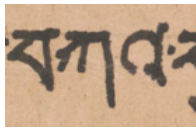
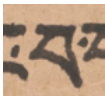
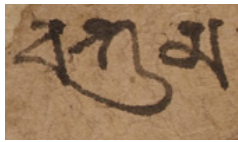
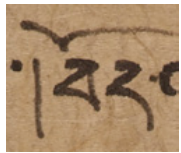
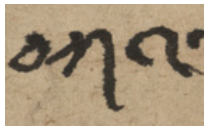
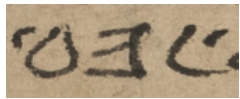
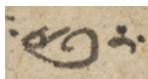
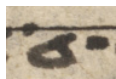
26 On P. tib. 849, see Kapstein 2006.

27 On these developments in European paleography, see Delorez 2003.

typology. The two tables below show the letters *ka* and *ba*. In Table I, samples from the manuscripts are shown; in Table II, I have provided schematic diagrams of the ductus of each letter in each style, with the number and direction of strokes indicated with arrow. This is intended to show where there is a difference of proportion or angle on the one hand, and where one is seeing a more significant change in the ductus.


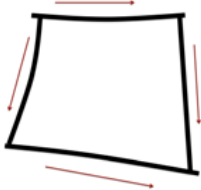



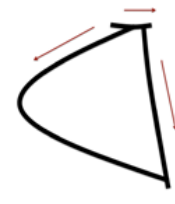

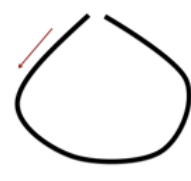
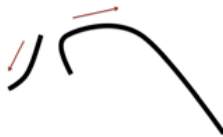

Of course, the first instance of identifying a manuscript with one of these script types is likely to be the result of a general impression, and this is fine. However, general impressions can be misleading, and the practice of identifying individual letter forms provides a better basis for identification. It is also important to understand how the letters are formed in each style in order to avoid the error of mistaking a taught style for the handwriting of an individual scribe. This is a rather basic error, but quite possible in an undeveloped field like early Tibetan paleography. As I have argued elsewhere, the identification of individual hands should proceed on the basis of first ascertaining the style in which the scribe is working, and next identifying idiographic features in the writing samples that can be linked to the scribe in question.<sup>28</sup>

Table 1: Examples of *ka* and *ba* in imperial-period manuscripts

	Style and manuscript source	<i>ka</i>	<i>ba</i>
1	Square (IOL Tib J 750)		
2(a)	Sutra, example 1 (IOL Tib J 107)		
2(b)	Sutra, example 2 (IOL Tib J 310.1209)		
3	Official, headed (IOL Tib J 1459)		
4	Official, headless (IOL Tib J 1126)		
5	Monastic (IOL Tib J 687)		

<sup>28</sup> See Dalton, Davis and van Schaik 2007.

Table 2: Ductus of *ka* and *ba* in imperial-period manuscripts

	Style	<i>ka</i>	<i>ba</i>
1	Square		
2	Sutra		
3	Official, headed		
4	Official, headless		
5	Monastic (IOL Tib J 687)		

## Conclusion

The usefulness of the typology of Old Tibetan writing styles which I have outlined here will only be apparent once it has been tested by others, but I believe that this is the correct first step. While recommending that others put this typology to the test, I would also urge that paleography is best used in conjunction with the other tools available to us. Paleographical evidence should be supported wherever possible by other levels of analysis: on the one hand, analysis of the physical nature of the manuscript, such as

paper composition and book format; and on the other, textual analysis, including orthographic and linguistic features of the text. If several of these tools are used together, the case for dating can be made with some confidence.

## Appendix: Selected List of Manuscripts by Style Type

### *Square*

IOL Tib J 750, P. tib. 1288 and Or.8212/187: The *Old Tibetan Annals*.

IOL Tib J 734: On the age of decline.

IOL Tib J 753: Law of theft (see also P. tib. 1075).

P. tib. 1071: Hunting laws (see also P. tib. 1072 and 1073).

IOL Tib J 740: Dice divination and legal document.

IOL Tib J 858: Official records.

P. tib. 1134: Funeral rituals (see also P. tib. 1136).

### *Sutra*

*Aparimitāyurnāma-sūtra* scrolls in the British Library found in the IOL Tib J 310 sequence.

*Aparimitāyurnāma-sūtra* scrolls in the Bibliothèque nationale found in the numbers above P. tib. 2216 (not found in Marcelle Lalou's catalogues).

(Smaller numbers of these scrolls are also found in the Russian and Chinese Dunhuang collections.)

*Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* manuscripts in the British Library are found in the sequence IOL Tib J 92–126.

*Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale are found in the sequences P. tib. 1299–2093.

### *Official (headed)*

IOL Tib J 1459: Letter from the palace (*pho brang*) of 'On cang do in Central Tibet (ending in headless form).

P. tib. 999: Permission to take copies of sutras from the library of the Longxing monastery.

P. tib. 1083: Official dispatch from Tsong ka forbidding abductions of Chinese women and children in Dunhuang by Tibetan officials.

P. tib. 1085: Official dispatch from the Lhan dkar pho brang in Central Tibet.

P. tib. 1089: Official dispatch from the Bde blon, changing to headless form towards the end.

### *Official (headless)*

IOL Tib J 1126: Letter from the Bde blon concerning a shortfall of grain.

IOL Tib J 1359(B): Register of scribes for sutra copying.

P. tib. 230: Copy of a prayer for the Buddhist activities of Khri 'od srung.

P. tib. 1201 (see also P. tib. 1202 and 1203): Letter to Hongbian, head of Buddhist clergy at Dunhuang.

P. tib. 1217: Letter from the Zhang blon chen po at Tsong ka.

P. tib. 1094: Contract for the sale of an ox.

### *Monastic*

IOL Tib J 3: Extracts from the Vinaya (Chinese on verso).

IOL Tib J 217: Extract from the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*.

IOL Tib J 218: Extracts from the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* (Chinese on verso).

IOL Tib J 301 and 302: Sutra commentary with interlinear notes.

IOL Tib J 686: The story of Maudgalyāyana, by 'Go Chos grub.

IOL Tib J 687: A compilation of sutra quotations, by 'Go Chos grub.

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## Images

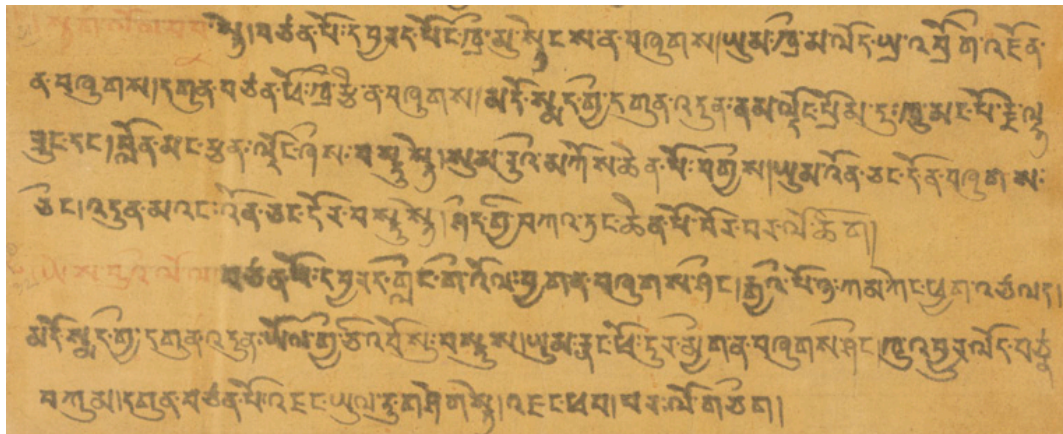


Figure 1: The square style as seen in IOL Tib J 750.

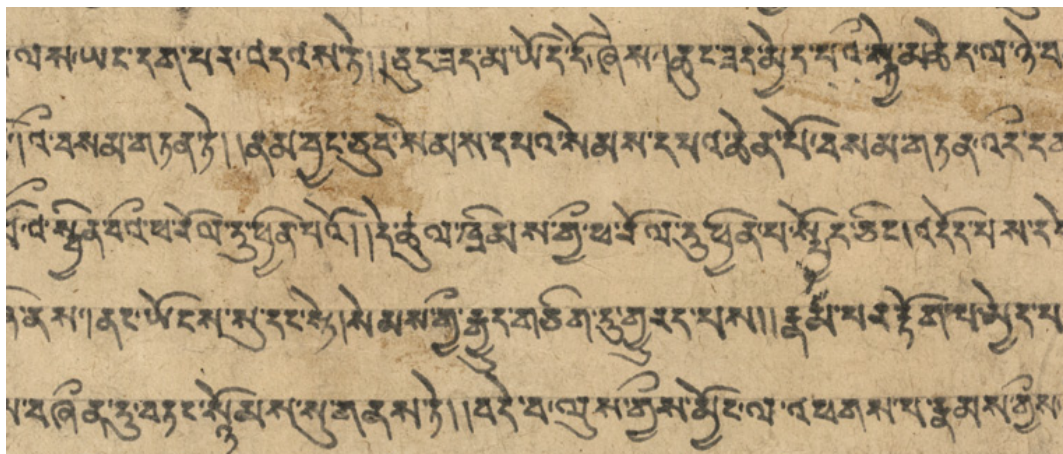


Figure 2: The sutra style as seen in IOL Tib J 107.5.

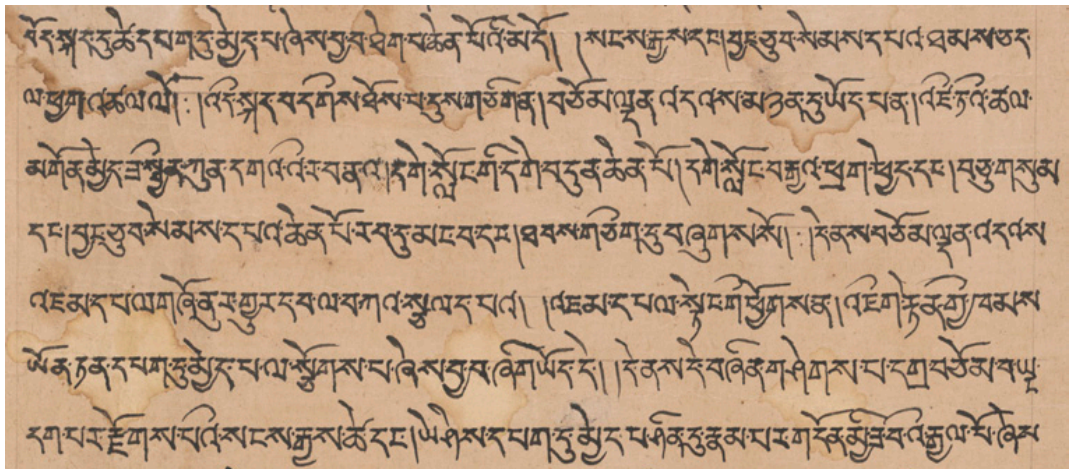


Figure 3: The sutra style as seen in IOL Tib J 310.1209.

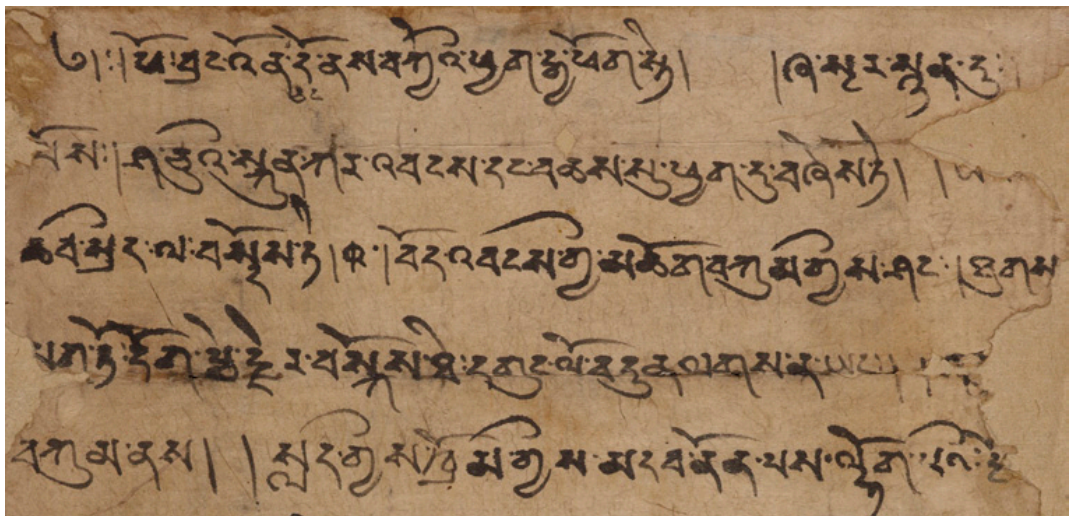


Figure 4: The headed official style as seen in IOL Tib J 1459.



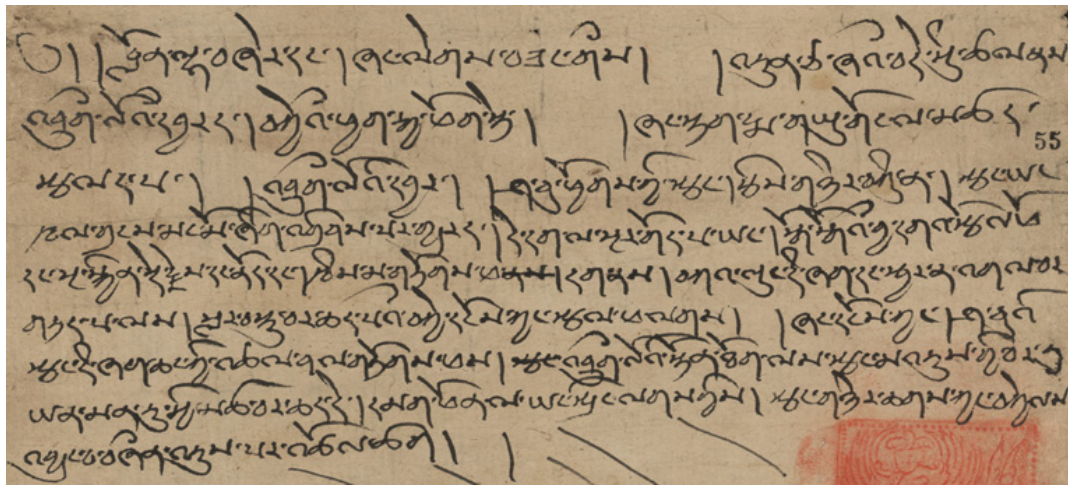


Figure 5: The headless official style as seen in IOL Tib J 1126.

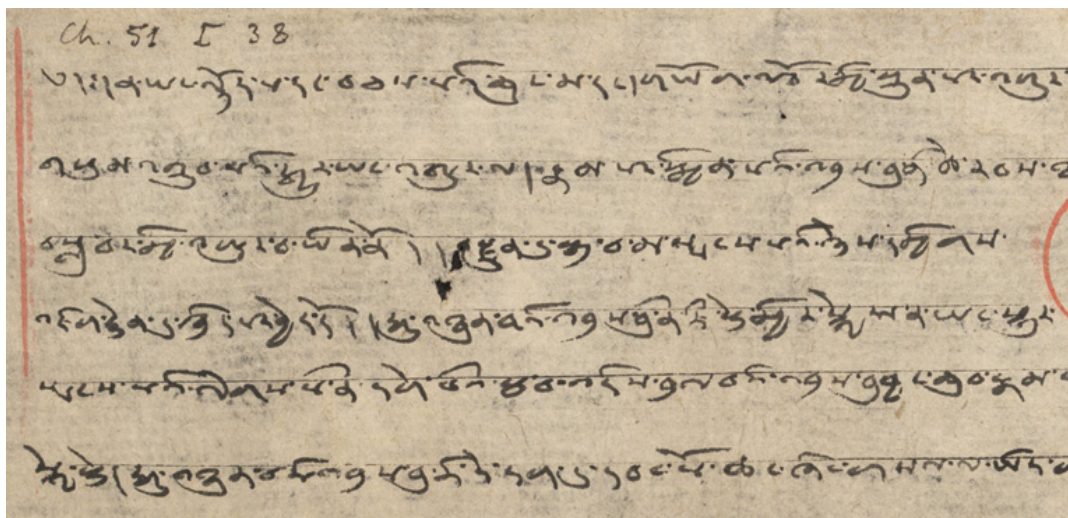


Figure 6: The monastic style as seen in IOL Tib J 687.