



## Recent research on the Dunhuang tantric manuscripts and its implications for our understanding of early Tibetan Buddhism

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The manuscripts found in the walled-up cave in Dunhuang, most of which date from the mid-eighth to mid-ninth centuries CE, are the primary source of information about the nature of Tibetan Buddhism in this early period, when Buddhism was first being introduced to Tibet.

In a collaborative project involving SOAS and The British Library, the Stein Collection of Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts kept at the British Library is being catalogued thoroughly for the first time since the First World War. In the intervening decades, the field of Tibetan Studies has of course advanced a great deal, and in particular we know much more about the tantric aspect of Tibetan Buddhism.

In this paper I give a report on the results of the research carried out by the project's two cataloguers – Jacob Dalton and Sam van Schaik – over the last year, and discuss in particular the implications of this research on our understanding of the tantric texts and practices which were introduced into Tibet in the early period of transmission.

The main points of discussion are: (i) the relationship between the Dunhuang texts and the canonical collection of early tantric material known as the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, (ii) the early attempts at the categorization of Buddhist literature in this early period, and what the significance of the tantric categories of *mahaayoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga* might have been, and (iii) the relationship between tantric discourse and Tibetan Chan in the early period and the possibility of Chan's influence on the later Tibetan tradition.